



THE GREAT
FRIGHT

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Desire

CHANGED

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The wealth of fun which lies hidden in tiny villages of French Canada here rise to the surface for the first time since Dr. William Henry Drummond brought the wit and some humor of the French Canadian home to the notice of this humor-hungry world. Not since *Johnny Courteau* and *The Fight* has there been such a character as *Onesiphore Pouget* or a book like *The Fright*. But the similarity in name is only an imitation of Dr. Drummond's famous Mrs. Macbeth and Mr. Conway have created original types in an original way that will delight the reader with

and

a little

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THE GREAT FRIGHT

BOOKS BY MADGE MACBETH

KLEATH

THE PATTERSON LIMIT

SHACKLES

In preparation

OFF-STAGE

SPAIN

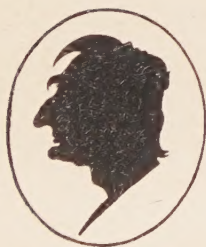
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The Great Fright

ONESIPHORE, OUR NEIGHBOR

by
MADGE MACBETH

and
A. B. CONWAY



Sketches by Bourgeois

LOUIS CARRIER & CO

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Bad luck to fight on New Year's Night,
An' wit' your neighbour man. . . .

William Henry Drummond
in *The Great Fight*

All the characters in this book are purely imaginary, and if the authors in any instance have used names that may suggest a reference to living persons, they have done so inadvertently.



SAINT-EPISTEMON IS A FANCIFUL VILLAGE

FOREWORD

THIS book was born of long and happy association with the French Canadian habitant. No one could hold in higher regard or more sincere friendliness the French Canadian people as a whole than do the authors.

It has been the literary fashion for some years past to depict the habitant in a constant and sometimes depressing atmosphere of fatalism, superlative piety, and duty-burdened earnestness. The stranger who knows the French Canadian only by reading may in time come to look upon the habitant as a sad-faced pioneer forever ferreting out duties to be done, forever telling his beads, forever battening his home against the Winter that howls at his door, forever paving the way for a smooth passage into a happier world.

While possessed of these and other admirable

FOREWORD

qualities, the French Canadian peasant is also equipped with gayer and no less enviable attributes. There is too strong a Gallic strain in him for laughter to be banished from his hearth. As a matter of fact genial lightheartedness reigns in ample measure in both the ancestral stone farm-house of the older parishes and the log cabin of the pioneer districts.

This book is not meant to be, and manifestly is not, a true picture of village life in French Canada. Characters such as Onesiphore and La Popote are comparatively rare, though their prototypes *do* exist. The village of Saint-Epistemon is a fanciful one. The book is a caricature as all attempt at humorous fiction must necessarily be. If any reader should insist on foisting a purpose on the authors, let it be interpreted as a sympathetic and sincere desire to draw attention to the gay, humor-loving and very human qualities of the habitant.

THE AUTHORS

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THE JACKET DESIGN IS FROM A SKETCH
BY MARGERY D'ARCY, ADAPTED FOR
REPRODUCTION BY PIERRE SAINT-LOUP

THE GREAT FRIGHT



HE MIGHT LOSE HIS TEMPER

CHAPTER I: SKIRMISH

THE general store of T  l  mache Bedaud stood on a corner, opposite the Church. It marked the intersection of the two principal streets in Saint-Epistemon de Dudswell—in fact, it might be said to be the village itself.

Rarely could one enter the premises without finding a neighbor already there, and on Saturday afternoons, when haying was finished and harvesting not yet begun, the place was crowded with the *jeunesses* from the surrounding country-side, who considered this an off season—a breathing spell—and made the most of it. The French Canadian rustic, like peasants the world over, does not regard constant pressure upon his respiratory system with any perceptible fervor.

On the whole, the young men gathered in the store were contented, savoring that delightful ease which

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is the reward of labor done. They rubbed reflective hands over the week's growth of whiskers, to be shorn on the morrow, incinerated their *tabac naturel*, and looked over Télémache Bedaud's stock, hoping dimly to discern some new merchandise on the jumbled shelves—a hope seldom gratified. Occasionally, one of them would say something, and an observant stranger, watching closely, would be apt to receive the impression that the impulse towards speech had its rise in some obscure anatomical recess, finally reaching the surface much as bubbles shoulder their way upwards from a dark, still pond. A peaceful scene.

When the slanting rays of the sun, edging through the crowded display windows, indicated that the afternoon was wearing into evening, the group began to show signs of dispersing. Hercule Begin, remembering the four miles that separated him from supper, gathered his legs under him, and after sedate and dignified *adieux* was just about to pass through the door when another young man entered.

“*Bonjour, Hercule!*”

“*Bonjour, Wilbrod!*”

“It's a pity you depart just as I come. I had looked forward to hearing you converse.”

Hercule looked at the newcomer with some suspicion. Wilbrod Cabochin was the son of the *avocat*, and he had been “well instructed”. He had education, and as a consequence, one never knew whether he was laughing at one or not. He said things that sounded polite enough . . . he would make an inno-

SKIRMISH

cent-seeming remark, turn his head slightly and half wink at the rest of the fellows, thus suggesting to them some exquisite jibe which was not apparent to the object of his affable attention . . . then everyone would laugh. . . . It was disconcerting. Nobody felt very comfortable when singled out for Wilbrod's conversational engagements. Hercule was suspicious.

"Me, I don't talk very much, you know. . . ."

"True, you aren't a chatterer, but when you do say something, it is worth the pains to listen."

"Well, Wilbrod, we should be thankful if *le bon Dieu* has given us sense. Now, I am going home."

"Eh? It's a pity, because I wanted to ask you to make up a party at cards or dancing, this evening. You know my cousins, those young ladies from Quebec, who are staying with us? . . . Well, to tell you the truth, they observed you passing in the street, and they inquired of me who that good-looking man might be, and then—you know those girls from the city, they're hardly modest—they said I must bring you around to see them."

Hercule gaped, and then hearing snickers from the lounging group behind him, blushed and edged away. He remembered having seen Wilbrod's cousins; in fact he had had a good eyeful of them. They were different from the country girls, particularly in the molding of their allotment of flesh. This much their attire, also meagre, revealed. In fact, the heretical notion had crossed Hercule's mind that *le bon Dieu* was a somewhat uneven workman. It appeared that this difference in person extended to manners, also.

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. . . Fancy their being so bold! He would like very much to go . . . but unfortunately. . . .

"You know, Wilbrod, that tonight is Saturday night, and that I always go to see Mathilde Pouget on Saturday night."

"Ah yes, I had forgotten that you were *fiancé*."

"Well, it's hardly come to that yet," disclaimed Hercule, a little hastily, "but you see, Mathilde would be disappointed if I didn't come, all the same."

"Yes, you couldn't disappoint her. I forgot when I promised my cousins, that you were one who had many calls on his time. Well, go and see Mathilde then. You are a lucky man—as well as a courageous one."

"Maybe," agreed Hercule, with simplicity, and passed on down to the hitching rail, where Babette, the respectable Begin mare-of-all-work, drooped her head. He had unfastened the hitching strap when he became aware that he was the subject of conversation among the party he had just quitted.

". . . but what I cannot understand," . . . It must be Euphorbe Gagnon who was speaking . . . "is why you called him courageous. . . . Everyone knows. . . ."

"Why, it's simple enough—You know Mathilde. I ask you, could anyone lacking in courage kiss a girl like that? You have observed her mouth! It is not a feat to be performed without steady nerves . . . to hang over an abyss of that nature!"

Silence for a moment, followed by an uncertain laugh. It was safe to laugh when Wilbrod looked

SKIRMISH

mysterious even if the joke was not immediately discernible. The first speaker went on:

"It was most humorous to see Hercule swallow that about being a man of courage, when everyone knows that a rabbit in the mating season would make him run!"

This sally, being comprehensible, was greeted by an approving roar. Its echoes died down, and the humorist, flushed with success, was about to favor the listeners with more details on the character of M. Begin, *fiis*, when he observed a constrained expression on their faces. They were looking sheepishly at something which seemed to be behind him. He was in the act of turning his head when it received a prodigious blow, a blow originally intended for the ear, but which due to the movement of the target found the eye instead. When the exuberance of the resulting pyrotechnic display had died down, the chastised wit discerned Hercule brandishing his large red, knobbly fists within two inches of his nose and demanding whether further proof of his stout-heartedness was required.

When the daze had cleared away from Euphorbe's intellect, he was invaded by a very great rage, which, however, did not entirely rob his subsequent proceedings of system.

He first delivered a violent and hobnailed kick upon the left shin of young M. Begin, and followed it by a lusty haymaker which connected with the Begin whiskers, and threw his opponent off his balance. Hercule staggered back and would have fallen had he

THE GREAT FRIGHT

not preserved his equilibrium by catching hold of a soup-ladle that hung from a wire above his head. This steadied him, but it had the regrettable effect of breaking the wire and precipitating a minor avalanche of the variegated hardware which depended from it. Several saucepans, dishpans, milk pails, coffee pots, and two specimens of an unmentionable article of bedroom furniture descended, following their first crash with musical clankings, as they rolled to the several quarters of the room.

This catastrophe brought no pause to the combatants, who were locked in a close embrace, Hercule vainly trying to get his right arm free in order that he might be able to employ the ladle (still held in his right hand) with more telling effect, and Euphorbe earnestly endeavoring to find an effective tooth-hold on his enemy's shoulder—in which design he was considerably hampered by a stout, hand-woven woollen shirt. Woollens are notoriously bad chewing.

It was not long before their strivings overcame their balance. They fell, rolling over and over on the dusty floor, while a chance kick shattered the front of M. Bedaud's one glass display-case. At this point, the outcries of the eminent retail merchant became so piercing as to compel some attention from the spectators. A posse of referees was organized which undertook to give the combatants a less confined battleground. This was effected by carrying them to the door and allowing them to roll down the steps. It was not accomplished without casualty; one of the volunteers had left his thumb in too close proximity

SKIRMISH

to Euphorbe's mouth, and Wilbrod's expensive grey trousering was stained by the gore which flowed profusely from the same gentleman's nose. His excited remonstrances (in which the details he gave of the price of the material and the very fashionable character of the cutting) did not induce the interest which he felt should be taken, and Télémache's wails and demands for recompense for his devastated store were also received with indifference.

The fight had now reached its closing stages. The antagonists could hardly do more than gasp. Even when Euphorbe got the grip he was trying for, lack of breath compelled him to relinquish it, while Hercule's manipulation of the now sadly battered ladle had scarcely the force of a Scotsman waving away a drink. At length, they separated by a sort of mutual consent. Both gladiators had had enough.

The assurances of their respective adherents that they had nothing to fear, and that now was the time for a decisive assault, were powerless to move them. In fact, without relinquishing their attitudes of defiance, they drew farther apart and brushed aside the friendly hands that sought to impel them towards each other.

When pressed to give their reasons for discontinuing the *mêlée* so well begun. Euphorbe professed a modest aversion to figuring as the hero of a manslaughter trial, adding that if he continued to fight much longer he might lose his temper and then he could not be sure of what he might do, and Hercule observed that if he did not get home shortly his din-

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ner would be getting cold, adding that if M. Gagnon desired to have his visage eaten, he had only to come down to the *Begin terre* any time after six o'clock and he would be obliged most thoroughly, by damn!



DELIGHTFULLY SHOCKED AT THEIR BOLDNESS

CHAPTER II: COURTSHIP

THE art of dining is not highly developed in the Parish of Saint-Epistemon. The viands lack variety, and conversation is not encouraged. Talking with the mouth full presents difficulties, and the *habitant* makes it a practice, when at table, to have his mouth full; as full as possible. Occasionally, it is necessary that a few words be uttered so that re-filling may be continued, but, like many another rustic, the French Canadian peasant at table is a strong and silent man; silent, that is, save for the sounds that local custom considers inseparable from the processes of mastication and ingurgitation. The women generally eat after the men have finished. This is necessary because food should be kept hot; the place to keep it hot is on the stove; someone must be at hand to fill the plates from the pots on the stove.

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Supper, in the Begin household, was served according to tradition. Polycarpe, the father, and Hercule, the son, stolidly stuffed themselves, and when they had reached the stage of satiety and eructation, tilting back their chairs against the wall, Zenobie, the mother, toyed with the remaining victuals. Her customary complaint that working all afternoon over a hot stove robbed her of all zest for food, lost its poignancy since she disposed of some forty cubic inches of boiled salt pork carved off the slab, and a pound or so of "potack" with three slices of home-made bread, well poulticed with wild strawberry jam, by way of dessert. Copious draughts of green tea washed it all down.

"Well, tonight is our night for visits," observed Polycarpe, rolling an indulgent eye towards Hercule, after he had accomplished the absorbing business of dislodging fragments of the repast from his dental interstices. He regarded the young man affectionately. There was a *jeunesse*, he reflected, of the right stamp—solid, dutiful, contented—at the same time with a trace of the *gaillard*, a latent devilishness, a swart romanticism. If Polycarpe had ever heard of the term, he would have said that his off-spring had a potent "sex appeal." He would also have said that in this he was a chip off the old block.

As he fondly dwelt on the filial lineaments, an abnormal contour of the right cheek excited his attention.

"You have pain with your teeth, Hercule?" he

COURTSHIP

inquired, solicitously. "You have an afflicted visage, it seems."

"It is nothing," affirmed Hercule, hastily, turning so that his profile was presented to the anxious parental gaze. His mother paused in her attack on the food long enough to direct a searching look at the swelling, and to prescribe a hot raisin, with perhaps a mouthful of *whiskey blanc* and an early resort to bed.

"Euphorbe Gagnon," roared Hercule, suddenly, "is a pig. The child of a dog, in fact!"

Clearing up this zoological confusion gave Polycarpe little trouble. "Oho," he said, "you have been fighting. Aha! And what for, may I inquire?"

"No one is going to say that I lack courage! I am no giant, and I am no Jack Renault, or Ovila Chapdelaine, but when you see Euphorbe Gagnon at the Mass, tomorrow, regard his left eye. Then you will see something!"

"I am not one for fighting without a cause," gravely pronounced Polycarpe, though his eye gleamed, "but a man without courage is no man at all; so you had reason for beating the one who taunted you. I remember, when I was a young fellow, I went in the woods to work for Price Brothers at the lumbering. . . . Many rough fellows were in our camp. . . ."

Hercule was a dutiful enough son, but here he recognized the opening sentences of an oft-told tale—an epic of Homeric conflict between *Begin pere* and a lumberjack of giant frame and ferocious disposi-

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tion—so, muttering that if the cows were to be milked, and he to appear at his tender rendezvous in time, he would have to be up and doing, he seized his hat and made off.

Polycarpe continued his narration with slightly diminished enthusiasm to his reduced audience, until the resounding clatter which Zenobie made with the dishes convinced him that his spell-binding eloquence was unappreciated, and he too made off to the barn for the nightly duties with the kine.

When all the chores had been performed and the cattle were “mouching” back along the muddy lane to the hill pasture, Hercule was free to attire himself for his weekly worship at the shrine of Venus. Normally, on such occasions he felt extremely elated and had been known to burst into song. But perhaps “burst” is an extravagant word—Hercule’s vocal efforts never seemed to reach full and free expression. A sort of subterranean booming, a heaving and rumbling somewhat like the heaving and rumbling of the earth when a *camouflet* is exploded in mine warfare, was its normal manifestation. Polycarpe, whenever he caught the ominous sounds, would go through a pantomime representing his thought that the bull had abandoned the herd, had returned to the barnyard and was about to run amok. He would then gravely advise Hercule never to attempt to woo Mathilde by serenading. Hercule relished this facetiousness, in a way; it seemed a tribute to the great adventure and mystery of his love, an acknowledgment by his parent that he had attained maturity;

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was a man with a deep bass voice and other qualities even more potent.

Tonight, he failed to warble or even to simmer. He did not feel like singing, he acknowledged to himself, noting with surprise that the prospect of seeing Mathilde did not bring the reactions he had come to accept as normal. His pulse beat steadily—that it beat slower could only be his imagination!—and his temperature remained precisely the same. Hercule was not an introspective subject, but he felt impelled to analyze this lack of emotion. For a time the answer eluded him, but as he slowly drew off his working pantaloons, preparatory to donning those which were consecrated to Sundays and celebrations, the answer came to him. He knew then that he would rather, much rather, have been going to visit the alluring cousins of Wilbrod Cabochin, the sprightly city damsels, than the worthy God-fearing Mathilde Pouget . . . especially, as they had expressed a desire for his company. He was delightfully shocked at their boldness in commissioning Wilbrod to invite him—no girl in the parish would have thought of such a thing. Not even La Popote, who was . . . well, the less said about her character, the better.

Hercule's toilet came almost to a dead stop as he dwelt in recollection on the appearance of the sisters. He had met them strolling down the main street as he arrived in the village that afternoon, and they had passed the front of Bedaud's store several times. Their clear and brilliant coloring had been the first

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thing to excite Hercule's admiration, which was scarcely lessened when its artificial character was pointed out by the more sophisticated members of the *cercle* Bedaud. And then their dresses! If, indeed, they could be called dresses! A brisk breeze was blowing, and it molded the thin silk garments over the swelling contours of the Milles Bilodeau; while the stockings . . . Hercule had seen silk hose as flawlessly filled, but only in magazine advertisements, which were in all conscience sufficiently disturbing to any warm-blooded youth, but when the spectacle was in the flesh. . . .

Hercule savored the word "flesh" and rolled it round in his consciousness till his thoughts lost coherence absolutely. He was recalled from his voluptuous day-dreaming by Zenobie's inquiry as to whether he desired her to keep the stove lighted forever so that his shaving water would be hot, and the information that he was even now late for his rendezvous, and what would Mathilde think? He continued dressing with a bad grace, muttering his indifference to the opinions of Mathilde in a way most unbecoming to a youth who was supposed to have serious and honorable intentions.

When he had half-finished shaving, a sudden idea came to him, and he startled the peacefully smoking Polycarpe by blurting out:

"*Son père*, is it that you would say Mathilde is a good-looking girl, for example?"

"Mathilde is a good girl, but certainly, my son," he replied, when he had digested the purport of the

COURTSHIP

question. "She is strong—strong almost as a man, and of a good heart, and kind."

"But her face! What do you think of it?"

"Oh, as for me, I do not bother myself to think about the faces of women. The face makes no matter. Look at your mother, for example . . . she is none the less a good wife."

"Look at your own face, my friend," observed Mme Begin, acidly, "I am sure, for that matter, no one else will care to!"

An obscure reference to a fresh cheese followed, but was lost in the renewed questioning of Hercule.

"But one has remarked, without doubt, her eyes are somewhat traversed . . . and no one could say that her mouth was small."

"Who has stuffed your head with all this nonsense? You must have been reading a book! Mathilde's eyes are good enough for her to see her knitting and the needle as it sews your pants. As for her mouth—it is not the size of a mouth, but its activity that you should fret yourself over, when it comes to choosing a wife. I should be sorry if Onesiphore Pouget heard you talk in such a way."

"Onesiphore— Oh, I know you are afraid of him, but *I* am not! When I marry Mathilde, I will thank him to keep his nose out of my affairs. But I do not say that I have made up my mind to marry her. . . . There are other girls! A man like me does not need to be in a hurry!"

"What other girls? Say now, what is in you, this evening? You do not know whether you will marry

THE GREAT FRIGHT

Mathilde, indeed? Well, me, I know something . . . and that is that you *will* marry her if I say that you shall, and what is more, you will stop this foolish talk instantly and get along to the Pougets. Do you suppose Onesiphore will want to stay up all night, while you talk like a fool?"

At this ultimatum, Hercule subsided into indistinct mutterings, finished his dressing, seized his hat and went out . . . not neglecting to slam the door as an indication that while his lips were silent and submissive, his spirit was rebellious and unbroken.

Reaching the road, he halted, undecided whether to go on to the Pougets or not. He dwelt for some time on the possibility of walking to the village and dropping in on the Cabochins. True, he had told Wilbrod he could not come, but then the girls would doubtless be pleased that he had changed his mind. . . . But perhaps in the meantime, Wilbrod had secured some other young people of the village to make up his party. Hercule visualized his entry. What would he say, or do? He had never been to the house of the Cabochins, even when the Mlles Bilodeau were not there, and he felt that his *savoir faire* was unequal to the test of making an elegant entrance and a good impression. Regretfully, he abandoned the project. Return to the house was impossible—his father had made that clear. It was chilly outside, and he had no mind to spend the next couple of hours walking the road. He might skulk in the barn, but on reflection decided that the society of the Pougets

COURTSHIP

was preferable to that of the cows and pigs, so set off thither.

Polycarpe, meanwhile, was the prey of disquieting thoughts. What in the name of the devil had got into the boy, he wondered? Until tonight, the affair had prospered very well. It had seemed a satisfactory match. True, Hercule might have done better by himself in a financial way, for Onesiphore was not a rich farmer; still, Mathilde was the only child and would certainly inherit the farm, which was a good-sized one. If Onesiphore would only spend half the time in husbandry that he did in reading books, arguing with his neighbors, engaging in disputes and playing hob generally, Polycarpe reflected, he would be prosperous. He, himself, owned little more land, but he was one that attended to business, and as a result he had a fine herd of cattle—nearly all pure-bred Holsteins. The sale of their milk to the butter factory brought him in a comfortable income. He had a good house with a coat of paint; a good barn; raised tolerable crops of hay and oats and had a little money in the bank. He would be able to set Hercule up, when the marriage should finally be arranged. The young couple would come and live in the Begin home, and perhaps, in a few more years, when Hercule was well settled, with an increasing family, and he himself should have reached an age at which he was entitled to dignified ease, he might deed the land over to him. The arrangement was a common one in the Province—the young people were given the land, with the provision that the

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old people should be kept in comfort on the proceeds.

These satisfactory and normal plans now seemed uncertain of fulfilment. True, Hercule's strange ideas might be only of passing importance, but young people were apt to act on impulse, and if he began to talk in that fashion to Onesiphore, there would be a terrible to-do, violent language and perhaps physical assault, with an end to the matrimonial arrangements. Then the business of getting Hercule betrothed would all be to do over again, and it happened that there was a shortage of eligible *parties* in the parish at that time. Such a silly notion the boy had taken into his head, too! That Mathilde was not sufficiently beautiful! Polycarpe tried to call to mind the features of Mlle. Pouget, but did not succeed very well. Her eyes and her mouth, Hercule had objected to, had he? Well, she *was* cross-eyed, there was no gainsaying that, but what of it? Polycarpe wondered, if he were a young man whether Mathilde would have stirred his blood. He was not very old now—not too old, at any rate, to appreciate a handsome woman—and he had to acknowledge that he had never had any thrill from contemplating his son's inamorata. He cast a speculative eye at Zenobie, almost asleep now over her knitting, and remembered that once it had seemed to him the height of bliss to hold her hand, and that when their wedding day drew near his appetite had failed. . . . Yes, he had been in love with his wife, and she had seemed beautiful to him in those days. She did not now, and he

COURTSHIP

wondered, as does every married man, whether the change had been in her or in the eyes with which he regarded her.

While Polycarpe worried and philosophized, his offspring had reached the Pouget home and had installed himself according to custom. To all appearances the visit was exactly similar to any one of the previous visits that stretched in an uneventful vista back for some six months. Entry, greetings to Onesiphore and his wife, a grin at Mathilde; comments on the weather as affecting the prospects of husbandry, then sitting in the rocking chair, beside Mathilde. Presently, a unisoned rocking would begin, and Onesiphore would proceed to discourse on the subject upon which he happened at the time to be engrossed. No conversation was expected of the lovers—they were together; they might hold each other's hands, and could rock in their chairs to their heart's content, dreaming of the bliss that would one day be theirs. In the summer they had sat in the yard and watched the sun decline; now it was early autumn and not too warm, so they sat in the kitchen—the living-room of the house—and hypnotized themselves by staring at the large lamp with polished tin reflector, that hung on the wall beside the stove. Their eyes shone (eyes will, when turned towards a light at the proper angle) and smiles flickered, spread, and faded on their not very expressive countenances. A cynical spectator, anæsthetized to the beauty of love in its more humble manifestations, might have

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been reminded of the smiles that play round the chops and jowls of a pig ensconced in his wallow, under a broiling sun. And all the time, Onesiphore's voice boomed on, and the rocking chairs went Clump-ump . . . Clump-ump . . . Clump-ump . . . counterpoint to the melody of the orator's periods and the kettle's singing.

Occasionally, Onesiphore would suspect that his declamations were receiving, at best, only divided attention. Bodily, the young couple were excellently well chaperoned, and expected to be, but in mind they enjoyed perfect liberty. Judging by appearances, nothing further from the practices of modern youth could be imagined, but beneath the surface, neither Hercule nor Mathilde were innocent of those tendencies which furnish perspiring preachers with texts for Jeremiads. Everyday experience taught biological facts which the city-reared only acquire indirectly. From the pulpits they heard harangues on the duties of matrimony . . . duties which were also delights. Their lives moved at slow rhythm: all would be accomplished in due time; they were untroubled by cantharides of gin, jazz, and the provocations of fashionable dress. They saw ahead of them a shining bliss, a goal which they would eventually and inevitably reach but to which it did not behoove them to hasten . . . as it does not behoove man to hasten the coming of spring, nor the procession of the equinoxes.

No, they did not listen to Onesiphore with any great degree of attention. He would have expressed himself strongly on this mooning, if it had occurred

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to him, for it was his favorite theme that his conversation was wasted on any auditors he might find in the parish—not excepting the *curé* and the *avocat*.

Now Onesiphore, though by no means the philosopher and savant he pretended to be, had for a *habitant* a remarkably well-filled head. Perhaps those things which filled it were never very well correlated, perhaps his brain resembled a curio shop under inefficient management rather than a well-ordered *magasin*; perhaps, also, his erudition betrayed itself in an astonishing flow of bombast and irrelevant digression; still, it could not be denied that his conversation was remarkable.

His education—if it can be so called—arose as follows: When he was a young man, a professor wandered into the parish. . . . The professor was an old country Frenchman who, after investigating most of the idioms of the many provinces of France, had come to study the French Canadian idiom. He consorted with the humbler folk, and soon found lodging with Onesiphore, then newly married, but an energetic, intelligent and industrious young man. The professor encouraged Onesiphore to talk—which was even then no difficult task—and hung on his words, making mental notes of the idioms and locutions, accents and other peculiarities of the local speech, as typified by the young Pougets.

Professional interest ripened into something like friendship as the professor recognized an original mind, and he lent Onesiphore books, which were avidly read. When the time came for the guest to

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depart, Onesiphore refused to accept payment for the three months' board and lodging—refused with indignation. He explained that while he might to all appearances be an ordinary *habitant*, yet he was a superior man, the descendant of *seigneurs* of the old days' *noblesse*. Pouget was a corruption for de Pataugerie. . . . The estates, well, there had been lawsuits, many heirs, and the English had come and upset matters, and finally—this in an alcohol-inspired confidence—so far as his branch of the family was concerned, there had been a trifling irregularity . . . a lack of ceremony, due to youth, hot blood, and a noble scorn of consequences . . . in fine, there was a bar sinister on the Pouget escutcheon. But the professor was to mark this; he, Onesiphore Pouget, could trace his ancestry without any doubt, to the Vicomte Raoul de la Pataugerie. . . . And the *noblesse* were not accustomed to taking pay for their hospitality. . . .

The professor had to accede, but he prevailed upon Onesiphore to accept, as a token of his regard, a stock of books which he had with him. Furthermore, after he returned to France, he sent out a hamper laden with literature—intellectual dynamite—Voltaire, Rousseau, Anatole France, Zola . . . and Onesiphore, devouring it, became one of the damned. He furnished to the *curé* texts for several sermons: but the sermons the *curé* preached about him were nothing to the sermons he preached about the *curé* and the whole institution of Mother Church. Only the more daring spirits of the parish would listen to his fulminations; the ordinary run of them would scuttle

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away at the first blast. It was a matter for fascinating speculation exactly when lightning from heaven would strike down the blasphemer, or when the earth would open and swallow him up. But years had gone by, and neither of these phenomena had come to pass. Onesiphore, once the novelty of rebellious iconoclasm had worn off, ceased to make a specialty of baiting God and his earthly vicars, and even was known, once or twice, to attend Mass. But he had developed a voracious appetite for curious information of all kinds and was never more delighted than when he had discovered some new antinomianism with which he could astonish and alarm his neighbors. He even hinted at a contempt and scorn for Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and during the Great War professed to be hot for conscription; and afterwards, when *les Rouges*, almost all-powerful in the Province, were campaigning for a "solid Liberal block," he bought a large framed picture of the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, and displayed it prominently in his parlor.

He kept up a strange correspondence with his professor friend, who prized him as an original and a curiosity and took great delight in showing these marvellous and indignant epistles to brother savants. In return, he sent Onesiphore his old periodicals, and an occasional book, and answered his letters punctiliously if somewhat briefly. Onesiphore, on his part, took great pride in referring to his correspondence with "*L'éminent M. le professeur Clementin de Daumertin, de l'Université de Tours.*"



WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN PHYSICAL CHARMS

CHAPTER III: FLIGHT

THE evening's courting confirmed the feelings which Hercule had perceived in himself during the time he was dressing—the disquietude which he had voiced to his father and for which he had been so sternly rebuked. This sort of disturbance invades the heart of nearly every lover at some time; he debates seriously with himself whether the object of his affections is really worthy of him; whether he is choosing his life's partner as wisely as he might. If it is only in the absence of the beloved that such doubts obtrude themselves, all may yet be well; the wedding bells will probably ring and the pastor will get his fee. But if this state of mind persists when he is in the presence of his prospective mate—if he finds himself examining her features critically and in cold blood, the chances are that the marriage will

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not take place . . . that is, unless the lady is of a remarkable perfection; and even perfection is boring, in long-continued doses.

Hercule was conducting such an inspection of the physical charms—or what should have been physical charms—of Mathilde. He did not appear to be so doing. As has been said, to all appearances, tonight's visit was exactly the same as any of his previous ones. But appearances deceived. Hercule's guileless eyes saw his lady in a new and different light; behind his placid brow unaccustomed thoughts swirled; smiling lips screened a mouth in which the taste of ashes lay. One would not have believed him capable of such dissimulation, but a natural immobility of countenance favored the concealment of his sentiments.

Judging by the standards which had been set up for him that day—by the Mlles. Bilodeau—Mathilde's beauty was a minus quantity. Absolutely! Her hair was black and straight, and was piled on top of her head in a complicated and messy coiffure that resembled a turban. Compare that with the bobbed and waved golden locks of Celeste Bilodeau! Her complexion— Well, obviously she scorned the aid of cosmetics, and maybe she was beyond their aid. Her eyes, though black and lively, were most noticeably crossed, and her mouth *was* abnormally wide, though otherwise not particularly unpleasant to observe. She had put on her best stockings, this evening; real imitation silk so far as just below the knee, where the cotton began. The muscles of her calves would have been admirable in a footman. . . .

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Her feet were crushed into slippers that were too small. This was not due to vanity, but simply to the fact that the village store did not carry a size sufficiently large to fit her. Of course, shoes of the proper size could have been obtained, but that would have meant waiting, and Mathilde, having the money, burned to complete her purchase, so decided to submit to discomfort rather than delay. The shoes would stretch, in time.

Hercule saw no reason to hope that her other charms, concealed by a garish and badly-fitting dress, would be of a superior order to those on exhibition. She was a fine, well-developed girl, who would probably weigh in the neighborhood of one hundred and sixty pounds—so estimated Hercule, who had some skill in judging the weight of live-stock. Had this bulk been properly distributed, it would have given her a voluptuous air, but such was not the case. Her waist was undeniably thick, her neck but a stodgy isthmus between trunk and head, while curious pads of flesh were superimposed upon her generous outline. Hercule was not averse to a certain steatopygia, yet, in Mathilde's case, he felt it to be immoderate, overdone.

All things come to an end: even an hour spent with a woman whom one no longer loves. Hercule stalked forth into the night, his mind made up. He would not marry Mathilde—he would sooner perish! The affair had gone far; he had hardly realized, until tonight, how deeply he was committed. But the pronounce-

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ment of his father, and certain remarks which Onesiphore let fall, had opened his eyes. It was plain that all the other parties to the marriage considered him as good as at the altar. Well, he would show them! For a while, he dreamed of a dramatic, public announcement—after the Mass, tomorrow, for instance. He would solemnly serve notice on the parish that he repudiated any nuptial arrangement between him and Mlle. Pouget.

But then what? There would be a terrific explosion—Polycarpe would call down curses from heaven upon his undutiful child, and Onesiphore would not only devise some inordinate abuse but probably commit assault and battery. Unpleasant as this might be, however, the continual nagging of his parents would be worse; nor would he be heartened by the oblique looks the villagers, his erstwhile comrades, would cast upon a deceiver of trusting young womanhood. He understood now why Wilbrod Cabochin had always so ceremoniously complimented him on the beauty and parts of his chosen one. . . . Bah, he would like to have Wilbrod here and demonstrate to him that he, Hercule, knew a pretty girl when he saw one. He would demonstrate it by forceful application of his boots to the Cabochin posterior.

Yes, life in Saint-Epistemon would be insupportable; therefore he must take his departure. This was a project he had meditated before now, though of late, the *affaire* with Mathilde, and all the plans consequent thereupon, had kept him from thinking of it. But many of the *jeunesses* of the parish left for pas-

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tures new; it was a very common subject for day-dreams when existence on the farm grew more than usually tedious. Life was much better and brighter in the cities; for less work one got better pay. Also, one had ready cash to jingle in the pockets, without having to wring it from unwilling parents. One was one's own master—that is, out of working hours. And there were amusements to be had . . . theatres, moving pictures innumerable, parades on the streets, magnificent shop-windows to stare in, millionaires riding in outrageously-costly cars to be gaped at, dancing in a multitude of palaces where every day was a feast day . . . and the girls! The women! Like the Mles. Bilodeau . . . and thousands upon thousands of them! A personable young man could not help having adventures. In fact, there was a well-organized industry which catered to young men desiring experience of a certain sort. . . . Hercule had heard tales from the villagers who had returned on visits; also, from travelling salesmen. The tales of these latter gentlemen were the best of all, for it appeared that their *amours* cost them nothing; they always found lonely ladies, desiring consolation, and pursued the gayest life imaginable, cuckolding husbands and seducing virgins with such gay insouciance that no sin could be charged against them, whatever.

Hercule had made one great decision, tonight. He found it easier to make a second: to wit, that he would say nothing to anybody, but would go far, far away from his home—no less a distance than to Montreal! There, he would hide himself among its

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million inhabitants and would become a city man—entitled to all the gratifications which city-dwellers so easily obtain. Some provision of money would be necessary, and by great good fortune, Hercule could lay his hands upon a sum which would suffice. Polycarpe had just been paid by the butter factory for his month's milk; he had left the bills in a tin in the kitchen cupboard.

While he formulated these plans, Hercule had been plodding along, and now had reached home. Stealthily, he opened the back door, paused, and was reassured by the measured snoring of the elder Begins. Trembling, he tiptoed across the kitchen, opened the cupboard, groped for the tin, found it, extracted the bills, put back the tin, closed the cupboard and tiptoed out again. Not a sound! It had been ridiculously easy. Now, all he had to do was to walk some eight miles to Harrierville, where he would catch a train at four in the morning. That would take him to Sherbrooke; from thence he could easily reach Montreal. He had five hours or more to make these eight miles. His best suit he was wearing—none of his other scanty possessions were worth the trouble of bringing. He was on his way towards the city of delight and adventure.

Polycarpe was awakened next morning by Zenobie vigorously prodding him in the back and announcing that Hercule had not slept in his bed. He was nowhere about, she declared.

When Polycarpe had grasped these statements, his

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first thought was that he would be obliged to go up to the back pastures after the cows. This was Hercule's habitual job. Where could the imbecile be? He had gone last night to the Pougets, and probably returned some time before midnight—when, exactly, the old people never bothered to learn, for they retired early and slept soundly, confident that Onesiphore would turn the young lover out at a respectable hour. Then, the recollection of Hercule's strange words and manner on the previous evening came to Begin *père*. Obviously, this must have some connection with his son's disappearance. Perhaps he had been taken sick, and had fallen down in a fit somewhere between the two houses. Perhaps he had become entirely demented and was now wandering about the countryside. Perhaps he had fallen into a swamp. A swarm of disquieting suppositions rushed into Polycarpe's mind. Swearing profusely, he seized his trousers. He would dress, and go first of all to the Pougets.

In five minutes, he was hammering on the Pouget door, relieved that he had not found his son lying stark in a ditch, mid-way. Onesiphore presently made his appearance, somewhat blear-eyed, and inquired what it was that Polycarpe had.

"It is Hercule; he has not slept at the house; he has disappeared. He did not remain here?"

"But, certainly not. Last night, at half-past ten, he bade us good-night; since then I have not seen him. You say he did not sleep in his bed?" Onesiphore paused, abruptly, an alarming idea having assailed him. With a "*Torricu!*" he turned and rushed up

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the stairs, leaving Polycarpe open-mouthed. His footsteps could be heard in the passage; a door was flung open, and bits of conversation followed, Onesiphore's booming tones alternating with Mathilde's deep contralto which, without much exaggeration, could have been called bass. She sounded querulous, but although Polycarpe strained his ears, he could not catch the words. Presently, the sound of Onesiphore's feet descending the stairs was heard, and he reappeared, with a somewhat abashed air, seemingly a little at a loss for words.

"Mathilde, does she know anything?" queried the bereaved father.

"No—or so she says." With emphasis— "The hussy is impertinent, in fact. The truth is, when you said that Hercule had slipped away from the nest, I expected to find her gone, also. Young people, when the blood runs hot . . . I don't have to tell you, *mon vieux*, of the emotions at that period. . . . It occurred to me that these young fools, infatuated with each other as they are, had found themselves unable to wait for the authorization of Holy Church; in short, that they had committed an indiscretion and had been afraid to return. But I am glad to say that this seems to be a mistaken idea."

Polycarpe, who had a very different idea of the possible cause of his son's absence, was taken aback. However, he recovered himself, and observed:

"One never knows . . . though Hercule is a steady young lad, and not one to take advantage. . . . But there must be some reason. You saw noth-

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ing strange, last night? He did not appear feverish?"

Onesiphore guffawed, vulgarly. "No more feverish than a lover should be," he cackled. "Those two—such a pair of love-birds . . . it is touching, I give you my word. But to be serious—it is doubtless some prank. Perhaps Hercule, a trifle inflamed, found himself unable to sleep in his bed. Perhaps he walked about the country to cool himself off. He will return when he gets hungry . . . and that will be soon enough."

"In the meantime," sighed Polycarpe, "I suppose I must climb away up to that cursed pasture, and look for the cows. Well, *au revoir*, Onesiphore."

"When the young ninny returns, thump him well, and teach him to go chasing the moon and making annoyances for his elders," advised M. Pouget, as Polycarpe moved off.

The latter gave a vague assent, but he felt that Onesiphore's supposition was far from being the correct one. Still, he could provide no better solution, himself, and for the next hour or so, occupied his mind with thoughts of the dire punishment he would visit on the erring Hercule when that youth should return. He had gone away from the house, angry; probably he had stopped with a friend, who would strengthen some nonsense about leaving home and working elsewhere, as a hired man. Well, he would have those ideas changed in quick order.

Polycarpe hitched up the buggy for the trip to Mass a little earlier than usual, and started off. He

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did not discuss the matter with Zenobie; in fact, he had not replied to her anxious queries, except to recount briefly what he had learned at the Pougets, and to inform her that when he met her son, *he* would learn that his father had not lost his authority! They jogged along the road, silent except when neighbors were encountered. Then, after the usual greetings, Polycarpe would inquire, with an attempt at casualness, whether they had seen Hercule that morning. In every case a blank was drawn. To the questions that followed, Polycarpe returned vague replies, which sharpened curiosity, so that by the time the Mass began, everyone in the village knew of the mysterious disappearance of the Begin *fi*ls, and wild rumors began to circulate. . . . Polycarpe had driven him from the house with a shot-gun; he had gone out to hunt a bear and had killed a calf, so was afraid to return; he had run off with Mathilde to the States, where they were presumably to live a life of sin; and many more. Polycarpe had pursued his investigations in all the likely quarters of the village, without result.

Even the *curé* seemed a little distraught as he went through the ceremonial of the Mass, and, when the time came for him to make announcements, the excitement and tension were almost painful.

“Hercule Begin, the son of Polycarpe Begin, of the Sixth Range, is missing from his home. It is requested that anyone who knows of the whereabouts of this young man, or anything which might explain the circumstance, will inform M. Begin, who will be

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at the door of the Church after Mass." That was all, but it was a proof that there was a real mystery, and it is a regrettable fact that few in the congregation had their minds fully on their worship for the remaining twenty minutes of the service.

Though there was a large crowd eddying about the door, no one had any clues to offer, and although Polycarpe rather enjoyed the commotion of which he was the centre, he found after a while that the unanimous expressions of regret among his friends prefaced sly innuendoes and attempts to sound him as to the circumstances relating to Hercule's departure. He wearied of evasion and subterfuge, and decided to set out for home.

M. Begin did not realize that there was one member of the group, vastly more perturbed than the rest, and that person was Euphorbe Gagnon. A group had formed itself about him, at a little distance from that which swirled about Polycarpe, and the event was discussed in all its bearings, especially in its connection with the fracas of the day before in the establishment Bedaud.

"I do not wish to be alarming, Euphorbe," said Wilbrod Cabochin, solemnly, "but it seems to me there is something grave in all this . . . for you, especially."

"Why is that, Wilbrod?" asked Euphorbe, perspiring. He had formed a theory of this nature himself and only feared that Wilbrod would confirm it—which, as a matter of fact, he proceeded to do.

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"Well, you dealt him many blows—and of a terrific violence. One, in particular, nearly shattered his jaw."

"Bah! They were little more than taps." Euphorbe did not hesitate to contradict his boastings of the previous evening, when he had spent some time asserting that Hercule had had much the worst of the encounter, and showing his own damaged knuckles as proof of the impact of his punches. "They would hurt nobody, and, except for the fact that Hercule is a very great coward and soft as a pudding, he would not have noticed them."

Wilbrod shook his head, sadly and doubtfully.

"You, my dear Euphorbe, are unaware of your own strength. One could see that when he left, he was scarcely sensible. He reeled, it appeared to me. I have no doubt he was practically unconscious—although it must be admitted that with Hercule, a little scattering of the wits would not be immediately apparent. . . . I have much fear, however, that the matter is most serious . . . that there has been a concussion."

"What is that, a concussion, Wilbrod?" This from several bystanders.

"Well, it means the brain has been shaken, and badly disarranged. The sufferer may appear normal for awhile, but then he loses consciousness and sinks into a coma from which it is rare that he recovers. It is often known to happen in the prize ring."

"But, if all that happened to Hercule—and mark

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you, I do not see how it could, for the blows were so very gentle—I did not want to damage the poor lout—why did he not fall ill at his house?”

“It comes on suddenly. After he had left the Pougets where, no doubt, the presence of his beloved sustained him somewhat, he wandered into the night air, which is generally dangerous. Then, his affliction overtook him; he did not know where he was, but stumbled on till his legs could no longer support him. . . . Like enough he sank down, overcome, in the fields or in the bush . . . perhaps in a swamp. Who knows? By now, he has probably breathed his last. The exposure, you know.”

Euphorbe made a strangling sound, and averred he believed nothing of it. Hercule had run away from home for reasons of his own. He was too solidly built to be discommoded by the few feeble slaps he had suffered. In any case, he, Euphorbe, had to be off; he could stand and gossip no longer. As he went away, he could catch the beginning of a discussion as to whether he would be liable in case the worst had happened, for murder, or only for manslaughter, and what the penalties were for these misdemeanors. . . .

Euphorbe professed to be incredulous of Wilbrod's theory, but it must be recorded that he spent the rest of that afternoon and evening conducting a systematic search over the Begin and Pouget farms; a search in which he was considerably hampered by the necessity for keeping out of sight of the owners. He returned late at night, exhausted but in some degree reassured that Hercule's carcass (if he had really

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succumbed to his injuries) was not likely to be soon discovered.

Polycarpe had reached the outskirts of the village when he was hailed by Osias Patelin, who had driven up behind him in an automobile. Osias was a prominent man in the country-side. His chief vocation was that of a cattle-buyer, but he had many other irons in the fire, and travelled far and wide in the province.

"Polycarpe, *mon vieux*, there is something I would like to say to you," he began, when the vehicles had drawn up side by side. "It may—though I do not say it does—concern your son. I did not like to mention the subject in the midst of all that crowd . . . one does not want to have one's private affairs made public property."

"What is it, then?" asked Polycarpe, none too graciously. He was somewhat annoyed that Osias should have made him wait about all that time. His discretion was commendable, of course, but the parish knew everything there was to know anyway, so, argued Polycarpe, why not make a clean breast of the matter? If his neighbors did not learn the truth they would speedily invent some tale more intriguing but less creditable to all concerned.

"It is this," mysteriously divulged M. Patelin. "I beg you not to place too much reliance on what I say, but last night I arrived at Harrierville by the 4.37 train, and when I got off, it seemed to me that I saw a young man embark. In fact, I am sure that a young man embarked, and he was not unlike Hercule,

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though, not expecting to see him there, the resemblance did not occur to me until I heard the announcement at the Mass. This young fellow, when he saw me, turned away so that I could not recognize him but as I say, his actions did not interest me at the time. Now, it seems that they were a little strange, and I think if you inquire at Harrietteville Station you might solve the mystery."

"Goddam to Hell!" burst out Polycarpe, who had a slight acquaintance with English. "*Maudit!* What you say sounds as if there might be something to be learned there! I will go as soon as I have had my dinner. But it is a bit of a drive."

Osias took the hint. "I should be glad, *mon vieux*, if you would come in my car. An afflicted parent—it is everyone's duty to do what one can. Besides, it is a pleasure for me to help an old friend."

Polycarpe, with profuse thanks, climbed from his buggy and got into the car, directing Zenobie to drive home and be sure to have his dinner ready—also some for M. Patelin—by the time they would be back. Osias let in the clutch and with a grinding of gears they were off, a rapidly diminishing dust-cloud marking their progress.

Zenobie had hardly completed her culinary preparations before the Patelin car drew up at the gate. Simultaneously, with the screech of the brakes that announced its halt, Polycarpe bounced in through the door, rushed to the cupboard, seized the tin that served him as a cash-box, looked in, turned it upside

down and shook it, then glared at Zenobie, his face working in the most astonishing grimaces. These were caused by his inability to find words adequate to the occasion, and the intense need he had of relieving his feelings by speech. Osias entered and stopped in the doorway, aghast at the tableau.

"Oh, M. Patelin," cried Zenobie, "what has happened? The money has gone! Is it that we have been robbed?"

"This," said Polycarpe, in a choking voice, "this is what comes of marrying into a family of assassins!"

Polycarpe held very definite views on the influence of heredity, so far as his own family was concerned. Shortly after he had married Zenobie, one of her brothers had had an unfortunate difference of opinion with a game warden, on a question of out-of-season deer shooting. It had resulted in a jail term for the brother. But the misfortune did not fall on him alone, for shortly after his release, the game warden, while engaged in his duties, had been severely wounded. The report of the accident which reached the newspapers opined that he had been mistaken for a deer. This caused ribald comment in the parish to the effect that it had not been before realized that his horns were so prominent. The whole circumstance was regrettable, for the two young men had been good friends until the warden began to suspect that the glances cast by his wife at Omer might be inspired by something more than a kindly regard for the friend of her husband. The accident had proved nothing against Omer, however, and his precaution

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of leaving the country seemed quite unnecessary, unless one looked at the material aspect of the occurrence, for according to all accounts, he was prospering magnificently, as a mill-hand, somewhere in Massachusetts.

This episode in the history of an otherwise respectable family, had been the text for many a discourse from Polycarpe, and was invariably brought up when any of the Begin children (all of whom, save Hercule, had left the parish) were detected in the major forms of mischief-making. Then it was, according to Polycarpe, that the lawless spirit of the Tetreus (Zenobie's family) was proven to have communicated itself to the fruit of their union. It is a phenomenon which is common enough . . . among progenitors. . . .

Polycarpe continued:

"Yes, we have been robbed, and by my own flesh and blood! But I disown him! He is my son no longer! He is a Tetreau, and no Begin! That is apparent from his actions! *Caulisse!*"

With this appalling oath, Polycarpe sank down into a chair and seized his hair, putting his elbows on his knees. In an attitude of dejection he remained for some moments, until he was roused by the sound of food being placed on the table. He drew up his chair and invited Osias to sit down, declaring that he had no stomach for the meal. Whatever he *had* seemed adequate, however, for he dissected and consumed a considerable portion of the chicken—a rare

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treat—rehearsing concurrently, his latest solution to the mystery of his son's flight.

"The young idiot, he gets the notion that Mathilde Pouget would not make him a wife of sufficient beauty. How, I cannot say, for he sees no women to speak of, except his mother. But, nevertheless, he is right; in a way. Did you remark Mathilde as we passed by the Pouget place? She resembles Athanase Duperrier's brown mare. All the same, why should he expect a wife as beautiful as Mary Magdalene? He begins to talk some of this childishness last night, but I send him about his business, which, you understand, is courting. He goes to the Pougets, looks at Mathilde, and decides that no night would be dark enough for him to come to her bed and keep an easy stomach. Then he sneaks into my house, steals my money, and makes off for the city, or God knows where. There's a Tetreau for you!"

He glared at Zenobie, as if daring her to deny the last statement. Zenobie held her peace, which is to say, kept her scowl directed to the stove.

Polycarpe turned to Patelin and continued:

"I beg you, my friend, to say nothing of this to the village. I would not like it to be known in the parish. . . . Especially, the reason for his going. Onesiphore would be a madman. . . . But now, have some more of the chicken, and a few onions. You eat nothing. Zenobie, you are forgetful of our guest. Osias has been most kind. Together, we interviewed the station agent, and he recognized Hercule from

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my description. It was his new pink and green tie that supplied the clue."

The meal was not a cheerful function, and Osias hastened to fill himself to repletion. After that, it was but natural that he should recall important business in the village which required an immediate departure.

Promising secrecy, he climbed into his motor and careened down the road at a terrible speed. He *did* have business—that of telling his discoveries in the establishment Begin. It was a delectable tale and he told it well . . . to every one whom he saw, starting with the group in M. Bedaud's store and finishing only at the remotest *cabane* in the parish. Particularly, did he elaborate Hercule's sudden distaste for his fiancée, provoking Rabelaisian comment by his penetrating implications.

By Monday evening there was not a soul in the parish who did not know the ins and outs of the matter—except only Onesiphore, Zéphyrine, his wife, and Mathilde. Several persons had voiced the opinion that Onesiphore should be told, but when it came to the point of telling, no one had the hardihood to break the truth to the terrifying old man. By common consent, that privilege was left to Polycarpe when he should consider it fitting. Or perhaps Onesiphore would, by some indirect means, find it out for himself. The people licked their lips when they thought of his rage and humiliation . . . he that was so proud, to have his daughter scorned!

It was a delightful situation. The young men took

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especial pleasure in presuming an intimacy between the affianced pair of a most improper degree . . . exceedingly amusing . . . and the wits among the *jeunesses*—Wilbrod, the chief among them—found inexhaustible material for jest and scabrous conversation.



HIS GARGOYLE FIXITY RELAXED

CHAPTER IV: CHALLENGE

ON Thursday, Onesiphore made a trip to the village for some groceries. It was not strictly necessary for him to do this, but he desired to hear how the parish gossip disposed of the disappearance of Hercule. He had seen few people since the Sunday, and those to whom he had spoken seemed strangely uninterested in the topic, had answered his queries vaguely and had rapidly changed the subject. This was incomprehensible and he was not long in arriving at the conclusion that there was some mystery afoot—a mystery, combined with a conspiracy to keep him in ignorance thereof.

He had little satisfaction from Polycarpe. That harassed spirit, in response to direct and somewhat urgent questionings, had divulged the intelligence that Hercule had gone away by train—whither, no

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one knew—and had taken with him a substantial enough sum of money, the dividend of the Begin herd for a month, in fact. Onesiphore had pressed Polycarpe for his theory of the boy's motive in running away, but for answer received only a shrug and some vague mumblings that *le bon Dieu* doubtless knew, but probably nobody else—including Hercule—could explain the matter. With that, and the prediction that Hercule would return when his money ran out, Onesiphore had to be content.

He was not one to be contented however, when there was something mysterious to be probed. He had a lively and insatiable curiosity about other people's affairs, and here was a matter that affected him most closely. Cross-questioning Mathilde brought to light nothing that indicated a preconceived intention to disappear. Nothing Hercule had said to her indicated that he had contemplated this action. No amount of browbeating elicited anything more, and Onesiphore had to give over when the girl became hysterical and hurled the kettle at his head.

Now he was on his way to the parish forum. He would get hold of one of the imbeciles who infested the Bedaud establishment, gently draw him out and get at the secret. Athanase Duperrier, or Médéric Lafortune, for instance . . . he would guarantee to plumb the innermost recesses of their minds in the course of half an hour's conversation.

As he descended from his rig, Onesiphore heard sounds of lively debate. This was very promising. Full of his resolve yet preserving an innocent mien,

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he strode into the shop only to find that silence greeted him. From this he surmised either that he had been the subject of their discussion, or that it had concerned some matter of which he was not to be informed.

“*Bonjour*, Télémaque! *Bonjour*, Jean-Baptiste! *Bonjour*, Athanase, and *bonjour* to all the rest of you gentlemen! Pray do not let me interrupt the so lively chatter that I heard as I came up the steps.”

He rubbed his hands and looked from one to the other aware that all appeared uncomfortable under his scrutiny. None met his eye except the phlegmatic Télémaque Bedaud. Onesiphore owed him money, so Bedaud enjoyed a lack of disquietude in the presence of M. Pouget that was rare. At length, the silence grew unbearable and Athanase Duperrier had an inspiration. Clearing his throat, he observed as if continuing the conversation interrupted by Onesiphore's entrance:

“But these Bolsheviks, they are something hardly human, one would say. One wonders how God permits them to exist!”

“Ah, so you were disputing about the merits of the Russian Soviets? Aha!”

Onesiphore knew very well that they had been doing anything but this, but it happened that he had been reading about the Russian Revolution, and was not unwilling to pass on his recently acquired knowledge with some garnishing of his own opinions.

“Well, for my part,” he submitted, “I must say that their scheme of government seems to have some

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merit. The farmers and the workmen meet in councils and govern themselves, without the interposition of a class of rascally politicians who are only anxious to get your votes . . . after which they dash off to Ottawa, draw their four thousand dollars each year, remain for the most part drunk as lords in the expensive quarters provided for them in the beautiful Parliament Buildings, and are entertained by painted and powdered young women who are supposed to be stenographers. They can scarcely be brought to sit in the Hall of Parliament, at all. But at that I do not wonder, for to listen to each other propounding *bêtises* must be the dreariest amusement imaginable."

"Then you are in favor of what those Bolsheviks have done, Onesiphore?" queried Jean-Baptiste Lari-vière.

"Not at all! Though their political system, as I say, seems to have some sense, yet their economy is idiotic and unjust. Look you, this is what they propose. . . . They say all land belongs to everyone—the community. The farmers are allowed, however, to occupy it. That would mean translated into concrete terms, that I, Onesiphore Pouget, do not own my land any more, but that I am just the tenant of a lot of idle, rascally, good-for-nothings in the city. The crops I raise are not mine—I may only keep a small proportion of them, the rest must go to keep from merited starvation the aforesaid idle knaves. Think of that!"

A giggle was heard, and the giggler, Athanase Duperrier, explained what had moved him to hilarity.

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"It would be a sad day for the aristocrats when they had no more to eat than your farm would yield, eh, Onesiphore?"

"Indeed? Well, allow me to observe, M. Duperrier, that I have a large field full of thistles, where you and your brothers would find sustenance easily enough!"

This sally brought down the house, and Onesiphore went on in great good temper:

"Then, this business of the nationalization of women . . . a great deal of fuss is raised over that. People roar and groan, and say, 'Think, if these principles penetrate to our Dominion of Canada! Consider our wives and daughters, bereft of our protection—at the mercy of any . . . pirate!' I ask you, as men of the world, how many of you really would consider your wives in any danger? So long as it was daylight, at all events?"

He waited for applause, but this notion did not appeal to the audience. None, however, had the temerity to defend his own womenkind until Athanase Duperrier broke a long silence by spluttering:

"It is maybe all right for you to talk that way, Onesiphore. You doubtless know how to appreciate your own wife and daughter. Moreover, everyone knows that Hercule Begin, who seemed to have a strong enough stomach, ran off to Quebec, where he has taken ship for South America rather than marry Mathilde. I . . ."

Here Athanase's voice faltered and was still, for he had, in the heat of the indignation engendered by

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Onesiphore's repartee, said far more than he intended. At the same time, it had been an opportunity too good to miss. As he watched the rage boiling up within the old man, and saw his fists clench, he veered again, began to regret his retort and frantically sought for some plausible disclaimer. Before he could find a way out however, Onesiphore mastered the first ebullition of his fury, and said:

"Would you be so kind as to repeat what you have just stated, M. Duperrier?"

Athanase swallowed several times, failing to dislodge a large and sudden growth that had taken possession of his throat. He coughed. "Er—regret—well, that is to say—what *was* I telling you about? It was nothing—Onesiphore—I assure you, a jest . . . no more. . . ."

"I think you mentioned Hercule ran away because he did not want to marry my daughter, is it not?"

"Something of the kind, but do not let yourself be upset by a little joke. It was just an idea that came into my head."

"An idea came into your head? I cannot believe that! No, it was put there. . . . Who, I demand, may have given you this idea, Athanase?"

"It is my own notion—amusing, I thought. If you are really annoyed, I apologize. I cannot say more."

"Annoyed? But not at all. I merely am somewhat amazed at your concocting such witticisms. . . . One would as soon expect the cheese-factory to produce champagne!"

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This insult produced the calculated effect. Athanase lost his temper, and after an indignant defence of his mentality and wit, shouted:

"And as for that, I only repeat what all the village knows, and you might as well take it with as good a grace as you can. Hercule ran away because he did not want to marry Mathilde."

"Whom did he tell that to?" roared Onesiphore, springing across the store to bend over the diminutive Athanase, his fierce eyes glaring into the watery blue orbs of his victim.

"Who? How should I know? Leave me alone! Polycarpe says such is the reason—that is all I know."

"And doubtless you consider it a good reason, *hein?*"

"I? . . . But no! I always considered the boy an imbecile! Now, Onesiphore, be calm. You have our sympathy. It was only right you should know these things which are being talked about. You should not take it amiss."

Onesiphore looked from one to the other, and his inspection satisfied him that he had penetrated the village secret. The others had a relieved, yet expectant look. They were glad the news had been broached to him and were anxious to see what he would do. He allowed his rage to cool down. It had been simulated for the most part, to terrify Athanase and get out of him what he was concealing. He knew how to handle Athanase, he flattered himself.

"Very well, gentlemen," he said with dignity, at last. "I understand. But you will hear more of this.

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I do not allow myself to be slighted, nor do I allow engagements which have been entered into to be so carelessly broken. . . . But I came to this place to buy some things. Télémache, I have here two dozen eggs, which I suppose you will take from me at the usual rate. Now I want a sack of flour. . . .”

The recital of his needs came to an abrupt stop. Polycarpe had just entered the store. Oblivious to the drama recently enacted, he cheerily greeted his friends and received their salutations in turn, until he came to Onesiphore. A stony silence succeeded his “*Bonjour*, Onesiphore, I did not know you had come to the village.” Looking at his neighbor more closely, he perceived that all was not well.

“But, what have you, *mon vieux*?” he went on, after several seconds’ pause. “Are you not well?”

“Polycarpe, I know all! You can deceive me no longer. I would not have believed that such a smooth visage could cover so treacherous a heart!”

Polycarpe, bewildered, looked from one to the other, and saw on every hand faces as long as so many coffins. It was obvious that the beans had been spilled. But why should Onesiphore, even if he knew the facts, blame *him*? Because he had not divulged the circumstances sooner? Well, that had been from an unwillingness to hurt the old man’s feelings, and those of his daughter. However, he would express his regrets, now.

“My old friend, I see that someone has been telling you of the reason that the young idiot whom I am sorry to call my son, (in reality there is little of the

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Begin in him; he resembles exclusively his mother's family) why, I say, he has left a good home and prospects which any young fellow in his senses would have been delighted and thrilled with. . . ."

"That is all very well," interrupted M. Pouget, "but I am not to be put off in this manner. I have been told that the reason you give for Hercule's flight is that he suddenly had a distaste for Mathilde. What could be more ridiculous? Mathilde is a fine girl, and Hercule, as I and anyone else who cared to look could see, is mad about her. No, for some reason best known to yourself, you wish to evade the engagement you have entered into, and you make arrangements accordingly."

"*Ah! Sacré! Non*, that is not so! It is entirely Hercule! Saturday night he says to me, do you think Mathilde is beautiful? I tell him not to be a fool but to be thankful for her other good qualities, and he goes off to your house, muttering. That is all I know. He got this notion in his head, and that is all there is to it."

"I beg your pardon, but I am convinced that *you* put the notion in his head, if he ever had one, which I doubt! You decide that an alliance with the Pouget family is not sufficiently flattering to your grandeur, and you stuff the lad's head with nonsense that my Mathilde is not a delectable enough bride for him. You inflame him with sensual ideas of voluptuous women he may have, if he gives up the maiden to whom he has plighted his troth. I see it all! He, poor numskull, believes your lies and swallows your base

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insinuations, and taking the money which you provide, runs away, to hide until Mathilde has another accepted aspirant to her hand!"

A mutter was heard from an obscure corner that Hercule would be likely to remain hidden a long time, under those terms, but it was ignored, for Polycarpe had begun a voluble and indignant denial of Onesiphore's accusation. The latter appeared not to listen, but turned to Télémache and completed his purchases. In a minute, he gathered them up and made his way out of the store, still ignoring the protests and explanations of Polycarpe who trotted along a little behind him.

"Nothing you can say, M. Begin, can make me believe differently from what I do, now. You have made an engagement with me—I expect you to live up to it. When you bring Hercule back to my house and tell me the arrangement is to be completed, then, I will call you my friend again, and will try to forget the slight that has been put upon me and upon my family. But till then . . . I do not care to see you!" He drove off with an altogether magnificent dignity, leaving Polycarpe open-mouthed.

"What are you going to do about that, Polycarpe?" inquired Télémache, when Onesiphore was out of ear-shot.

"I? Do? Why, nothing! What can I do? Old idiot! He makes it out my fault. . . . Fool that I was to listen to him, to make apologies! He may go to the devil, and see if that gentleman can provide him with a suitable son-in-law! *Ba'tême!*"



THIS MOST OFFENSIVE WORD

CHAPTER V: WABACHE!

FOR months, the parish had lain in winter's embrace—an embrace which only now was beginning to relax a little. The young and active men had all gone to the bush to work for the lumbering companies, not to return until after the spring drive; the few that remained helped the older farmers cut pulpwood on their own properties, tend the stock, and chop birch and maple logs for the ravenous Quebec heaters. The social organism hibernated.

The long and undulating Sixth Range road lay peaceful under a blue February sky. The sun's rays, reflected from a myriad crystals of snow, paralyzed the vision, and the eye turned for relief to the dark spruce on the little hills on either side, or to the tamaracks and cedars of the swamps that in the low-lying places came up to the edge of the road-allow-

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ance. From the hilltops the road was visible for miles, straight as the compass of the old *arpenteur* (who had laid out the township when all was bush) could make it. In the desert of white, one searched for long before detecting signs of life—smoke from a distant chimney, or a speck on the road which a telescope would have revealed as a horse and sleigh.

On the road, this afternoon, about half-past three o'clock, there were two such specks, travelling in opposite directions. These were the equipages of the *Messieurs* Polycarpe Begin and Onesiphore Pouget.

The music of sleigh-bells is a notoriously friendly sound, but today the merry jingle touched no sympathetic chord in the hearts of the erstwhile friends. Polycarpe's red, round face grew redder and rounder, and his small black eyes glittered with suppressed fury when he recognized the oncoming turnout, while with every clank and tinkle that marked the lessening of the interval between the two cutters, the more fixed and sardonic became Onesiphore's smile—a smile made wolfish by wide-spaced, yellow tusks, framed in a provoking bristle of sparse whiskers.

The horses sedately slumped into a walk and turned out the exact distance that would clear the sleighs in passing. Polycarpe distended his plump cheeks until he resembled the frog of *Æsop's* fable, and Onesiphore grinned at his horse's tail as though each separate hair was a stupefying jest concocted by the devil. This endured until at the exact moment of passing, Onesiphore's gargoyle fixity re-

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laxed, and he pronounced confidentially, and apparently to his beast's rump the strange words:

"Sacré Wabache!"

Polycarpe's old Babette, aroused from her lethargic amble by a stinging cut of the whip, flourished her frowsy tail in the air and broke into a lolloping canter. Her laid-back ears caught a steady stream of unoriginal profanity and stray declamatory sentences, such as . . . "the species of crocodile! To call me, Polycarpe Begin, *that* . . . Wabache, indeed! I am not one to eat insults for more than a certain period of time. . . . Wabache! . . . always Wabache! I am a man of good position . . . as good as his, and what is more, of good Christian principles, which he has not, despite all his pretence to know more than the rest of us. . . . Wabache, indeed! . . . He has called me that for the last time, I will promise myself so much! . . . We shall see whether a respectable man must be continually insulted in this parish! . . ."

Still muttering, Polycarpe drove with an unaccustomed dash up to the general store of Télémache Bedaud where he alighted, threw the buffalo robe over Babette and stumped inside.

"What have you, my friend?" questioned the astute Télémache. The storm signals were plain to be read on Polycarpe's countenance.

"It is that I have had enough of it! Has a respectable man no rights? Am I to be continually affronted by an old reprobate who chooses to be offended at what I cannot help?"

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"Ah, the old Pouget!"

"Pig!"

"You are far too patient, Polycarpe, *mon vieux*, and this Pouget takes advantage," sympathetically observed one of the loafers by the big Quebec heater.

"But yes, I *am* a most patient man! You, Jean-Baptiste, have heard him call me—that which he *does* call me?"

"*Vra'*, I have heard him many times. One is not obliged to receive insults."

"Télémache, how many times in this store, since the Feast of the Assumption, have you heard Onesiphore Pouget call me—that most offensive name?"

"Often, often! How many times I am not ready to say at the moment, but you do right to be indignant."

"*Bien!* Then I, Polycarpe Begin, shall inform you of something. You, Télémache Bedaud . . . you, Jean-Baptiste Larivière . . . you, Alphonse Thibadeau, and you other gentlemen, I call you all to witness that I shall put a stop to this persecution of insults, hurled at me by an old reprobate!"

"What are you going to do, my friend?" queried Jean-Baptiste.

"I am going to confront that old species of reptile, and tell him what is in my mind. Then, if he continues, let him beware!"

"There you speak like a man, Polycarpe. But when do you go to see Onesiphore Pouget?"

"H-m-m. I wish to do nothing rash. . . . I call all of you to witness that I am not a rash man. I am indeed of the utmost patience. Is it not so, my friends?"

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"*Certain!*"

"*Ça, c'est sûr!*"

"It is well known that Polycarpe is of a most Christian patience!"

"*Bon!* So I shall do nothing rash. Perhaps I shall see him after the Mass, next Sunday. In the meantime, I shall think of what to say—what words to employ, that is. I know my mind, and Onesiphore shall know it, too!"

"Polycarpe, *mon ami*, if you will pardon that I should concern myself in your affairs in so far as to give you some advice—let no time pass before warning Onesiphore. If a plan is good, it loses nothing by prompt execution. . . . On the contrary! Also, you say 'After the Mass.' . . . Well, sometimes—often—he does not go! And if he does, it is not seemly to brawl near the sacred building. Oh, I know that you are a man of the utmost moderation, but the Onesiphore. . . ." An eloquent shoulder suggested that berserker instincts haunted the gaunt frame of M. Pouget and might, at the least provocation, break forth.

"What then?" inquired Polycarpe, a shade uneasily.

"Go to see him now, *tout de suite!*"

Polycarpe clutched at his pipe, as though for support.

"Under most circumstances, but certainly, *Télémaque*," he agreed, "I should do just so. But today—well-h-m—it is not altogether convenient. I have certain *affaires* in the village, you see—*affaires* that will

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not be set aside. It will be late before I am finished—very late, alas! True, the house of Onesiphore lies next to mine but I should not like at that advanced hour. . . . Besides, my friend, one cannot plunge into a matter of this kind. *Non!* One must reflect upon the best words to use and leave no possibility for misunderstanding. The pig!”

At this, a prodigious hubbub arose. The men were all agreed that delay was out of the question. They were so sympathetic that with one accord they offered to accompany the startled Polycarpe upon his mission.

“We must show Onesiphore that the village is united behind Polycarpe, and that respectable men cannot be slandered with impunity,” pronounced Médéric Lafortune.

“Well, Polycarpe,” continued Télémache, “what do you say to that?”

“Well, I say as I have said all along, that it is an excellent idea, and that the sooner we get started the better. First, I must make my small purchases from you, Télémache, and then. . . . I can accommodate three in my sleigh, and can you drive the others, Alphonse? *Bon!* In half an hour then, we will leave, and I will show the old scoundrel, Pouget, that he deals with a man that is a man! *C’est ça!* Télémache, a pound of *Rose Quesnel*. . . .”

The two sleighs containing the deputation, pulled up in the Pouget barnyard. The occupants clambered out and stood awkwardly in a clump while Polycarpe

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busied himself in blanketing Babette and securing her to the fence. He took great care over the task. Eventually, however, it was completed to his satisfaction, and he turned to the group, apparently rather surprised that they had not preceded him to the door of the house. Seeing that he was expected to take the lead, he advanced in a determined manner flanked by the deputation, fur-coated, red-mittened and portentous of mien.

Madame Pouget came to the door. "Well, gentlemen," she cried, "be welcome! Is it that you come for the *affaires* or only for a visit? Pouget will be delighted . . . he is fond of society—that man! How long it is since you have been here, M. Bedaud, and you, M. Lafortune! Don't wait . . . come in, all of you!"

Polycarpe, though the good dame's eye had avoided his, included himself in this invitation. He entered, and the rest of the men filed in after him.

"Gentlemen," cried Madame, above the shuffle of their feet, "will you not take off your coats? The kitchen is warm, and. . . ."

"Madame, you are very kind, but we are here on a matter of business that will not take long. And so we will not take off our coats! If you would inform M. Pouget that we would be glad to see him, to take up his time for a few minutes. . . ." This from *Télé-mache*.

"But certainly, M. Bedaud! He is even now coming, I think. He said that a visit from so many dis-

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tinguished persons necessitated his putting on a white collar. . . .”

Onesiphore entered. The deputation, huddled in one end of the room drew closer together, pushing Polycarpe out to the front. Onesiphore’s smile was genial save when his glance fell upon—or more exactly, seemed to pass through—the leader of the group before him. He apparently saw Polycarpe not at all.

“Ah, *messieurs*, what a pleasure, what an honor! It is not often that my humble house. . . . But no doubt you are cold after the drive from the village. . . . Perhaps a little *whiskey blanc*. . . . Zéphyrine, you might see. . . .”

“M. Pouget, we are not here for pleasure,” snapped Polycarpe.

“Ah, my friend the Wab . . . h-m . . . my old friend, Polycarpe!”

“You are good enough to call me your friend, now, but you are accustomed to call me otherwise!”

“Careful! Control yourself, Polycarpe,” counselled Témémache.

“It appears, gentlemen, that I have been so unfortunate as to offend my good friend, Polycarpe Begin. Perhaps someone will enlighten me as to what grave sins—errors of taste, of refinement, or delicacy—I am accused of. I am, in a way of speaking, at a loss,” said Onesiphore, plaintively.

“Well,” responded Témémache, who felt that an explosion could not be avoided if Polycarpe continued to act as spokesman, “the matter in a few words is

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this; you, once having been a good neighbor and most friendly with Polycarpe, suddenly turn against him. Well, that is your right. No one is forced to be a friend to anyone. But what is *not* right—what is contrary to neighborliness and good sense—is to insult a man continually, even if you do not like him.”

“Insult? When have I insulted my friend?—for I still call him my friend, though many men would not, seeing the way he has treated me in the matter of . . . But let that pass, I do not know what you mean by insults, *Télémache*.”

“Onesiphore . . . I should say M. Pouget . . . that is not true,” blurted out Polycarpe. “How can you have the boldness to say such a thing? Why, everyone in the village has heard you call me *Wa* . . . and you cannot deny it! Indeed, it would do you no good to deny it, if you dared!”

“You do not know how it pains me to have to listen to such wild language—and in my own house, too! Surely, *messieurs*, you agree that *this* is a little severe?” said Onesiphore to *Télémache*. “Cannot you persuade M. Begin to be a little more temperate? There is a manner, even when one feels oneself aggrieved. . . .”

“True,” agreed Bedaud. “Now, Polycarpe, you must be calm.”

“Am I to stand silent and hear falsehoods? Has he not called me—er—*Wabache* in your hearing, *Télémache*?”

“There, Onesiphore, you see what is the trouble! You must not expect a man to like being called a

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thing like that! Now, though you are not friends, there is no need for scandalous conduct. Insults do no one any good."

"Oho! So that is it?" Onesiphore's air became frankly hostile. "Well, gentlemen, since you have done me the honor to pay me a visit and give me your views, perhaps you will listen to mine. I am told I am a rude fellow who goes about insulting people. But have I no rights myself? Am *I* to accept insults and say, '*Merci monsieur*'? Now, most of you know what is the trouble between Polycarpe and me. It was agreed that his son, Hercule, should wed my daughter, Mathilde. Well, when the day for the marriage came near, our young sprig, Hercule, scampers off to Montreal, and leaves my daughter in the lurch."

"That was not my fault, Pouget," put in Polycarpe.

"Perhaps not! Perhaps so! But when I demand to know how you have permitted such a thing—things like that were not permitted to occur in my young days—you as good as tell me you don't blame the boy! Now, gentlemen, I appeal to you, was it a match to be spurned? Would not Mathilde have had the farm when I and Zéphyrine are no more? Beauty? Well, beauty fades quickly—not that Mathilde is not a fine bouncing *Cana'yenne*! There is her portrait. I leave you, gentlemen, to judge!"

Throwing open the door of the parlor with a sweeping gesture, he directed their gaze to the enlarged photograph that hung over the cottage organ. The

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eyes of the deputation followed the pointing finger but did not linger on the object of their gaze.

Eventually, an embarrassed cough from Télé-mache broke the silence.

"Well, gentlemen, I am waiting to hear what you think now."

"Onesiphore . . . you ask me, and I will speak! Of course, each man judges for himself in matters like this. Hercule was young, and when a man is young he is apt to see only the face that is beautiful. For myself, I do not mind eyes that go like that. I think that they accord an arch, a piquant expression to the face. Nor do I think that every woman should have a mouth like a cherry. By no means! There is fine character in large features, but. . . ."

"But . . ." interposed Médéric Lafortune, with rustic candor, "she is no *Madame Vénus*, by damn! I tell you that, Onesiphore, and the boy may have seen her the same way like me."

Pouget's face darkened. "Out of my house," he roared. "Hypocrites! I see you came here to insult me! But that does not go with Onesiphore Pouget. Clear out, and quickly, or I will see if my sixty years have not left me strength to chastise those who come to affront me in my own home!"

There was a rapid movement towards the door. Polycarpe, as enraged as Onesiphore, was swept out, struggling and inarticulate. As the wrestling group reached the foot of the steps, Onesiphore appeared at the door. He had recovered his temper and his

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Mephistophelean grin. There was an instant's silence. The struggles ceased. Perhaps he was going to apologize! Several pairs of eyes regarded him hopefully. But such was far from his intention.

"*Sacré Wabache!*" he bellowed, and slammed the door.

Polycarpe turned from red to white, and gasped like a fish. Then, recovering his wits, he screamed:

"Never again will you say that, Pouget! This is the last time, I tell you! Once more, and you will feel the hand of the law upon your skinny throat!"

He turned from the unresponsive house, stalked across the yard and snatched the robe off Babette.

"Into the sleighs, gentlemen . . . we waste time here!"

At the gate, a further idea came to him. He halted, and at the full strength of his lungs proclaimed:

"And what is more, I would rather that my son, Hercule, were betrothed to my dun cow than to your great, ugly daughter, Mathilde! *Marche donc, Babette!*"

And Babette went.

Saint-Epistemon de Dudswell had not been so stirred since the days of the war. The Begin-Pouget dispute was, moreover, a thoroughly satisfactory excitement. Every one in the village could take sides. The majority were perhaps with Polycarpe, but Onesiphore did not lack adherents. Many there were

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who said he had been shamefully used in the matter of the betrothal, and that if Polycarpe had the spirit of a man, he would avenge what he felt to be insults with blows of his fist and feet, instead of whining to the rest of the village and talking of invoking the law.

"Ho, Ho! The old Onesiphore spits, and then to Polycarpe says, '*Wabache!*' Yes, like that, he says it! And what does Polycarpe do? Swells out like a turkey-cock and smokes with rage, and nothing more. We have seen it twenty times! More amusing than the movies, it is! He is a hard one to get around, that old Onesiphore, with his dark smile!" Thus, the pro-Pouget party.

"Things have come to a fine pass if every respectable man is to have vile names hurled at him, and without redress! But he has been warned, the old villain—warned in the presence of most reputable witnesses—Polycarpe personally warned him! Polycarpe, in truth, has conducted himself with great moderation as behooves a respectable man, a law-abiding citizen. But that old Pouget. . . . Bah! A sharp lesson is what he needs."

This was the refrain the Beginites sang.

Athanase Duperrier, who was of a reflective turn of mind, accosted the *curé* one day in the street. There was no one near, and Athanase in a hushed tone, inquired if *M. le Curé* was aware of the dispute between MM. Pouget and Begin.

"Well, I have heard rumors that they are not altogether friends," said the *curé*, rubbing his chin.

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"It is a pity." He was, as a matter of fact, most anxious to know the ins and outs of the controversy about which he had not yet received full information. A few encouraging questions, and Athanase gave his loquacity rein.

"But the reason I spoke to you, *M. le Curé*, about this affair which doubtless to you seems silly and trivial, is that I wanted to ask what the word—er—this doubtless most unclean word—exactly signifies. Naturally, it is not in the dictionary, and I thought that a learned man like you, *M. le Curé*, if you considered it advisable, might enlighten me," concluded Athanase.

"Why, h-m. . . ." *M. le Curé* rubbed his chin harder than ever. "Why, my son, it is indeed a question whether or not I should tell you what this word means."

The *curé* thought hard. Old Pouget was not one of the elect of his flock. Had he not, when his fruit-trees were threatened with tussock-moth, relied entirely on heretic preparations to combat them, instead of invoking also the help of Holy Church? He had! That alone showed the character of the man!

It was unfortunate that he had no idea what the old reprobate's infernal word meant. The thought of confessing such ignorance to the inquisitive Athanase, however, was not to be tolerated for a moment.

"Hm . . ." he temporized, good-humoredly. "This most offensive word means. . . . On consideration, my son, I think it would be better if I left you in ignorance of the meaning of the word. Inno-

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cence should not be smirched. There is, nowadays, too much knowledge of evil and evil ways. But rest assured it is not a word which one Christian would apply to another. Good day, my son.”

Onesiphore and Polycarpe had not met since the day of the interview at the Pouget farm. Everyone was hoping that the next act in the drama would speedily take place, and in as public a manner as possible. It would be a pity for anyone to miss it. It was generally agreed that Saturday was the day when the meeting would occur, as both men were in the habit of coming to the village to purchase their week's supplies on that afternoon. Feeling mounted, and it appeared as though several minor feuds might grow out of the main stem.

Saturday, the town was at fever heat. Little work was done that morning, and by the afternoon, an extraordinary number of men had congregated in the store of Télémache Bedaud. Madame Bedaud also had an unaccustomed number of ladies calling upon her. They sat in the dining-room which opened into the store. Every now and then, a sibilant “S-s-sh,” would cut through the chatter, and all would pause, but as each alarm proved false, the demand for silence would be followed by, “Pardon, ladies, but I thought—” and the threads of discussion would be picked up once more.

The street in front of the store presented an unusual liveliness of aspect. Pedestrians passed and re-passed, though at no very rapid gait. They wore an

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aimless and slightly guilty look. Two troops of children—for partisanship made no account of age—waged a snowy warfare up and down the road to the battle-cry, "Wabache!"

Polycarpe's sleigh appeared at the turn of the road. Every mouth broadcast the news. Some stared at him shamelessly; others, of more delicate sensibility feigned ignorance of his approach. He appeared serious and determined, and he ignored many old acquaintances. Unfortunately, he could not ignore little 'Dolphe Menard, newly-breeched, and left behind by the ignominious retreat of the snowball warriors. Jumping up and down, he chanted the blood-stirring battle-cry, "Wabache . . . Wa-bache . . . *En avant* . . . Wa-bache. . . ."

Unfortunately, also, he was within reach of Polycarpe's whip, and being unversed in war he had neglected to protect his rear. Wherefore his primitive song came to an abrupt end and was succeeded by discordant yells as he decamped, amid hearty, almost hysterical laughter from those who witnessed the incident.

Polycarpe entered the store, greeted his friends heavily, and was greeted by them. He effected his purchases with dignity, feeling that all eyes were upon him. He would show them that he could be unmoved, calm, in a time of tension, when every nerve in Saint-Epistemon was taut and quivering. His business completed, he picked up his parcels, wished Télé-mache good day and walked to the door. As he stepped outside, Onesiphore Pouget rose up before

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him and blocked his passage. Polycarpe noticed in a flash that his rival wore his best clothes, and a wave of vexation choked him—a pity that *he* could not have thought of this piece of histrionism. There was a moment's hesitation, then Polycarpe turned slightly to the right. Onesiphore advanced a step. Another move or so, and the way to the door was clear. But Polycarpe kept a fixed and challenging stare upon the face of his persecutor.

The spectators held their breath. It seemed, however, that Onesiphore would ignore Polycarpe, that he had had enough, that he had profited by the warning. A feeling of sharp disappointment ran through the crowd. Was this, then to be the end of the affair, after so much delicious anticipation? Were they merely going to stare at each other like two old bullfrogs, and remain as inactive?

Onesiphore had his hand on the knob. He opened the door. Polycarpe turned away and was descending the steps. His face had lost its strained look, preparatory to assuming a triumphant smile. But—ah—Polycarpe stopped suddenly as though he had set his foot in a bear-trap, for from behind him came a gentle chuckle, and then, drawn-out, with a kind of grim voluptuousness—“*Sacr-r-é Wa-bache!*” And the door slammed.

Polycarpe stood frozen. The silence was shameful. Everyone in the street stopped stock-still and fixed their eyes upon him. He felt the blood rush up to his face like a sunrise in the mountains. Someone behind him snickered. He turned, but every face was of an

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unbelievable solemnity. Recovering, he walked heavily over to Babette, hurled his parcels into the sleigh, snatched off her rug and careened up the street to the house of M. Cabochin.

"He has gone to the *avocat's*!"

"Now, there will be trouble for someone!"

"But that old Pouget, he had a stomach, *hein?*"

"Amusing? More amusing than a cock-fight!"

"The old Onesiphore, he did not let himself be frightened. Oho, no!"

"And did you mark how Polycarpe thought that he feared him?"

These, and many other delighted comments passed among the thoroughly contented spectators and auditors of the scene. How thoroughly satisfactory it had been!

Meanwhile, Polycarpe had reached the residence of the *avocat*, whose office was, of course, in the same house. M. Cabochin opened the door himself, and met the fuming client with the most elaborate politeness. He could barely restrain himself from rubbing his hands, as he led the way into the inner office.

"I will not pretend, my dear M. Begin," he began, smoothly, "to have been altogether unaware that you might shortly require my services."

"Yes," assented Polycarpe, moodily, "all the village knows what affronts I have had to put up with. Everyone laughs at me. But by. . . ."

"My dear sir, you are quite wrong if you imagine there is anyone unsympathetic towards you. I have heard . . . but no matter . . . perhaps we waste

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time. Now, if you would be so good as to tell me all the circumstances. . . .”

Polycarpe hitched up his chair, glared earnestly at the *avocat*, and plunged into a thrilling recital of the feud between himself and Onesiphore from its inception until the dramatic culmination just recorded. The *avocat* rubbed his hands frankly, now.

“Excellent, M. Begin,” he said, at the conclusion. “I think I can promise you that we have an excellent case. We will sue this old rascal for slander, and wring damages from him.”

“Substantial damages! He must learn that he may not insult me for nothing!”

“But certainly! We will give him such a trouncing that he will not look sideways at a rabbit after we have done with him. We will make him grunt in an appalling fashion! Now, before we go further, at what figure would you place the compensation that would be necessary to salve the most unmerited wounds to your excellent character? I mean to say, those injuries inflicted upon you by this old villain?”

“Well, now! That is a matter of business and requires a little attention. It must be a punishment hard enough that the thick-skinned old animal will feel! Now, let me count. . . .”

Here Polycarpe lapsed into silence, while he stared at the stove-pipe and whispered over to himself dates which referred generally to some one of the major events of his year, such as. . . . “The Thursday after I killed the old pig. . . .” bending down one stubby finger after the other so that he should not

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lose count. . . “the Saturday I brought back from Sherbrooke my Sunday suit. . . .”

This continued for nearly three minutes, M. Cabochin preserving a polite silence until Polycarpe had completed his mnemonic feat, and announced gravely:

“How many times, do you think, M. Cabochin, that he has called me that? Not one less than twenty-three times! And then I tell him, with Télémache Bedaud, Médéric Lafortune and the others to stop it, and then he does it twice more! Twenty-five times!”

M. Cabochin clicked with his tongue, sympathetically.

“Well, M. Cabochin, I think that we will make this little amusement of M. Pouget expensive for him.”

He regarded the *avocat* doubtfully, as if afraid of the effect of his next words. True, Cabochin had advised severity, but might he not think that the proposed revenge was altogether beyond what would be necessary for the vindication of self-esteem? However, Polycarpe made up his mind that he would not be moved from his decision, and if M. Cabochin did not like to take up the case on those terms, well, he would place it in other hands.

“So, he called me ‘*Wabache*,’ twenty-three times! He will pay me Two DOLLARS for each time! That is forty-six dollars. And then, for the times after I told him to stop, he will pay me TEN DOLLARS, each time. That is sixty-six dollars, altogether! And if you think I am a hard man, M. Cabochin, I say to

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you that you have not suffered like I have suffered for the past five months!"

"Why, M. Begin, that is altogether ridiculous! Too high, indeed? It is an inconsiderable trifle! M. Begin"—here the lawyer paused to allow his next words their full effect upon the astonished Polycarpe—"we will sue him for ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS AND COSTS!"

"Holy Thunder! But it is a fortune!" Polycarpe's bewilderment did not take long to change into satisfaction, though tempered with a shade of doubt. "But say, M. Cabochin, is it possible that we shall get that vast sum out of the old reptile?"

M. Cabochin emphatically assured him that it was indeed possible, and cited numerous cases of high damages obtained for slander.

Polycarpe licked his lips. They spent some time arranging the further details, and when at length he climbed into his sleigh for the drive back to his farm, he was as calm and triumphant as though he had the thousand dollars in his pocket. He shouted good-humored greetings to all he met in the street, but would not be detained; he knew everybody was burning to learn what advice the lawyer had given and what legal action was to be taken. He preserved his sphinx-like attitude until the writ was actually served on Onesiphore about a week later, when the excitement in the village surged to a peak again.

Polycarpe coming in on his weekly trip for supplies, found all the notables of the *cercle Bedaud* awaiting him with an appearance of profound re-

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spect. Well, why should they not respect him—a man who was entering a suit for a **THOUSAND DOLLARS'** damages? He responded amiably to their discreet questions, and after a little persuasion consented to read them his copy of the writ. In a strained silence he produced the awesome document, and clearing his throat, delivered:

“ . . . that on the 12th. of February, and at divers other times, the defendant wantonly and with malicious intent did apply to the plaintiff slanderous and obscene epithets, to wit and more especially, ‘*Sacré Wabache!*’; and that subsequent to these occasions and in the presence of most reputable witnesses, being solemnly warned to desist from this injurious and malicious misconduct, did nevertheless disregard the solemn warning, and again in the presence of many eminent and respectable witnesses, apply the opprobrious and disgraceful epithet aforesaid to the plaintiff, to the said plaintiff’s great discomfort and material disadvantage. . . . Wherefore the plaintiff claims in satisfaction thereof the sum of One Thousand Dollars, *and costs!*”

Polycarpe waited until someone seemed about to break the silence that succeeded, and then with his most impressive intonation, announced:

“There, my friends! *That* is how Polycarpe Begin deals with those who presume to level at him scurrilous insults!”

And he stalked out.



A KISS, VERY HOT AND EARNEST

CHAPTER VI: SCANDAL

IN the weeks that followed, M. Eusèbe Cabochin, the eminent juriconsult, experienced a glow of satisfaction whenever he thought of the Begin-Pouget case. Already, the fame of the dispute had spread over the whole of the County Wolfe, and a part of the County Richmond. It was not too much to expect that by the time of the trial, interest would have increased until the judgment would be anxiously awaited in Sherbrooke—nay, in Montreal! M. Cabochin saw his practice growing by leaps and bounds as a result of the free and most valuable advertising consequent upon his forensic skill. He trembled with excitement when he contemplated the prospect, and did not omit to return grateful thanks to Providence for this opportunity of achieving eminence, and proving his wisdom in leaving the shire town where busi-

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ness was dull, and expenses were brisk, to return to his native village. True, litigation of a quality comparable with his attainments was almost non-existent, here, but he could live in moderate comfort—on his wife's small income.

But now, things would be different, M. Cabochin was convinced.

Once he had interviewed the witnesses, and made the arrangements for entering the suit, there remained little for him to do until the case should be brought before the judge, so he found many occasions for indulging in these rosy dreams. There was another reason why he derived such intense pleasure from the prospect of the trial, and that was his dislike of Onesiphore. Many years ago he had become aware that Onesiphore did not like lawyers, whom he classed with "the other thieves that come into their own when honest men fall out." It was slightly difficult for the *avocat* to ignore M. Pouget's opinions on the honorable profession, expressed as they were, with a vivacity approaching that of Dr. François Rabelais, who has dealt extensively with the same subject. The reason for this difficulty was that Onesiphore always seemed to time his utterances on the legal fraternity when M. Cabochin happened to be near—whether he came into Bedaud's store, or passed by on the other side of the street, the range of Onesiphore's vocal efforts was adjusted accordingly.

M. Cabochin's dignity did not allow him to appear to notice these vulgar assaults on the honor of his calling. Eventually, however, he could bear the per-

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secution no longer and determined to attack Onesiphore in an indirect manner. He would condescend to argue with him on some subject, unconnected with the law—for he had heard this Pouget was a great one to blather and bumble and pour forth heterodox nonsense in an unending stream whenever he could get anyone to listen to him. Well, the poor farmers and small tradesmen of the village, unschooled as they were, could not cope with this preposterous and pretentious fellow, but they should see that the windbag would be rapidly deflated when it was pricked by the keen needle of a trained mind.

Once the *avocat* made this resolve, a favorable opportunity for his assault on Onesiphore's position as savant and debater soon presented itself. He wandered in on the *cercle* Bedaud when a most fascinating discussion was under way. This was: do animals think, or does the lack of a soul prevent them from doing so? Onesiphore took the ground that they *did* think, although their thinking was extremely elementary. He supported his contentions with the Darwinian hypothesis of the descent of man, and the conclusions of an eminent psychologist then much in vogue in learned circles. It must be admitted that neither of the authorities quoted would have recognized the theories which Onesiphore put forward in their names, but nevertheless, there was great sound and fury in his argument and he held his audience spellbound. That spell, M. Cabochin set himself to break.

"You find then, M. Pouget," he observed, suavely,

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“that there is a similarity in the way in which you and a horse or cow, for example, ratiocinate?”

A titter told the gratified Cabochin that he had drawn first blood. Onesiphore's brow contracted faintly, but with an effort he achieved a bland smile.

“It is true that cows and horses are among the least intelligent of animals, *Monsieur l'Avocat*; nevertheless I maintain, as do many other learned men, that much is to be discovered from observing the functioning of their intelligence. . . . For example, consider the case of my pig. . . . But perhaps I have told you of this peculiar and intelligent animal before?”

“I, at any rate, have never been gratified by hearing an account of the mental processes of M. Pouget's pig,” remarked M. Cabochin ponderously, and winking at Télémaque Bedaud.

The onlookers moved a little closer. Good as the previous talk had been, that which was to follow promised to be even more enlivening. It was obvious that M. Cabochin had crossed swords with Onesiphore, and most of those present warmed at the prospect of seeing him given a taste of his own medicine.

Onesiphore appeared to notice nothing of this, at all.

“Well, *messieurs*,” he continued, “you know I have three pigs—two very large and handsome sows and one small hog, from the viewpoint of lard, is a sad failure—but let me assure you, he is of an intelligence!” He paused and looked around to make cer-

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tain he had everybody's attention. "When I dump into the trough their daily ration of skim milk, potato peelings, and other dainties, there is a violent struggle for the largest share of the victuals. Such is the nature of swine. If this hog had to depend on the effort of his sinews and muscles, a very small share would be his. But he is gifted with intelligence, as I have said. He creeps behind the two large sows who are engrossed in their feeding, and nudges, pushes, and bites first one and then the other. He is so artful in his manœuvres that the foolish sows each think the other is her enemy. So they fall to fighting, and his lordship the little hog guzzles his fill."

"That is merely the cunning of a beast," blurted out Médéric Lafortune. "Furthermore, it seems to me—although I do not expect a pig to see it in the same way—a most immoral proceeding."

"Immoral? I grant that! But we were not talking of morality. We were discussing intelligence. And for that, I think you must admit my pig is remarkable."

"Remarkable indeed!" M. Cabochin, who had fallen slightly under the spell of Onesiphore's dramatically-told yarn, now sought to regain control of the discussion.

Onesiphore raised his voice and drowned out the lawyer's further remarks.

"Yes," he shouted, "I have only one regret . . . that he cannot speak French! Then, he could take the examinations and the Government would make him an *avocat*! Good day, *messieurs*."

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Before the stupefied M. Cabochin recovered the use of his tongue, Onesiphore was swinging down the street, rousing the echoes with cacophonous laughter—laughter that rang above the appreciative shouts coming from the store Bedaud. M. Cabochin pulled his hat down over his ears, and betook himself to his home. Though his lips moved rapidly, no one could hear what he said—which was perhaps just as well.

Since that day, Onesiphore's diatribes against lawyers had practically ceased. Victory had made him generous, but M. Cabochin never forgot. Hence that worthy man's delight in the thought of Onesiphore twisting under his cross-questioning in the court room, and his anguished payment of the damages which could scarcely fail to be assessed against him.

But across these pleasant dreams a sinister shadow fell. An unexpectedly and intensely annoying circumstance—nothing to do with the Begin-Pouget case—caused the Cabochin brow to furrow. His son, Wilbrod, that intelligent and sprightly youth whose pranks and nose-pullings of the slower-witted peasants were the cause of endless chuckles to his proud parent, got himself into a mess. The calamity struck suddenly . . . lightning out of a clear sky.

One day, the lawyer met Télémache Bedaud and expansively engaged that worthy in conversation.

"Well, Télémache, the village hums with gossip about the *affaire* Pouget, I will warrant," he began.

Télémache shrugged his shoulders, half smiled and altogether appeared somewhat ill at ease. "Well—in a way . . . but to tell the truth, for the last

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two days that topic has been put aside for something newer."

"Indeed? And what is that?"

"Ho, Ho!" Télémache looked inexpressibly sly.

"Télémache, I see that this is something good! You must enlighten me." The *avocat* scented salacity.

"Well, I suppose you will learn soon enough, anyway." Here Télémache paused to chuckle: the situation was really extremely amusing. "Nothing less than this—La Popote is said to be *enceinte*! She was in the village, yesterday, many saw her, and there was about her figure that which was unmistakable!"

The lawyer burst into a roar of laughter. La Popote—Mlle Angèle Poitras, to give her her right name, which no villager ever did—was the village *grissette* . . . the occasional consolation of bachelors and widowers, and if scandal was to be believed, the half-time damnation of several married men. Tradition said that when she first fell from grace, there had been similar distressing circumstances, but she had somehow disposed of the child (if one had ever been born). Still . . . a lady of her experience . . . to find herself in such a situation. . . . It was too droll!

When the lawyer's snorts and heavings had subsided a little, he found breath enough to gasp:

"Indeed, these are amusing times. First the Begin-Pouget dispute, and now. . . . Well, I suppose my services will again be in demand. La Popote will no doubt come to see me for advice in the matter of the

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maintenance of her expected treasure! Ho, Ho!”

“Ha, Ha! *It would not be surprising if she did!*” Here Télémache, unable to retain his gravity any longer, went off into a wild splutter of mirth. Through it, he heard M. Cabochin:

“I foresee some difficulty in fixing exactly the responsibility. Has La Popote any definite notions on the subject?”

Télémache recovered himself, and rubbing his chin, answered quizzically, “Well, I have heard that she has most *definite* notions! I have been so informed by a person who does not wish me to mention his name.”

“Perhaps you can, in strict confidence, impart to me the name of the wretch who has so miserably betrayed a trusting young girl!”

“Really, my dear M. Cabochin. . . . I do not like to!”

“But, as her future legal adviser—and a man of proven discretion. . . .”

“Well then, since you urge me—La Popote claims that the young man responsible for her condition is—none other than—your son, Wilbrod!”

M. Cabochin leapt as if a firecracker had been exploded under his coat tails. The hilarity registered on his countenance was suddenly replaced by an expression of dismay and chagrin. No more thorough transformation could have been effected had he been a Greek actor, switching the mask of comedy for that of tragedy before his face.

“What? What do you say? Oh, infamous. . . .

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Impossible! My Wilbrod! He that is as innocent as a young ox!"

Télémache shook his head; sorrowful, yet persistent. "The person who informed me said that there was no possible doubt."

"Who is the person from whom you got this calumnious tale? I insist upon knowing!"

"Pardon, monsieur, but I gave my word of honor not to tell his name. The reason—well, he is a married man, and if it should become known that he had been conversing so intimately with La Popote . . . well, you can understand that it would be most unfortunate for him."

The *avocat* paused and considered, eyeing Télémache closely the while. He knew that the store-keeper was a stubborn man and that for the present, at any rate, it would be a waste of time to endeavor to worm the secret from him. Well, he would make enquiries in other quarters . . . at headquarters, in fact, for he would begin by putting Wilbrod through a blistering interrogatory. If the boy did not tell everything, it would be a strange matter. After that, he would see what further steps were to be taken.

"Télémache, I am obliged for the information. How disturbed I am by this—this—calamity, you can easily imagine. I appreciate the delicacy which prompted your manner of breaking the news, but beg that you will say nothing to anybody of this conversation."

"Oh, but certainly, M. Cabochin. I will be as silent as a log. You may rely on me!"

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M. Cabochin knew exactly how much he could rely on Télémaque's taciturnity, and Télémaque knew that he knew, but they parted with a solemn handshake, M. Cabochin to return home and fume until the erring son should appear for supper, and Télémaque to rush back as fast as he could to the store, to tell this delightful tale of how the lawyer had received the news of his son's indiscretion.



NOW THAT HE FELT CALMER

CHAPTER VII: AMOUR

To love unlawfully is nearly always romantic; to be found out is nearly always sordid. Now, Wilbrod seemed likely to experience the sordidness, but he had known the romance. It happened in this wise:

One evening in September, driving back from Harrietteville where he had been sent on an errand by his father, he perceived in the gathering dusk a woman seated by the side of the road. He was traversing the Gosford highway where there were no farms. A thin growth of scrub-bush covered the rocky hills on either side, and occasionally a ruined log cabin in an abandoned clearing testified to the attempts of disappointed and long-forgotten pioneers to carve out farms from the inhospitable forest.

He saw her from quite a distance, and began to speculate, with excited curiosity as to who the lone

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female might be. Where could she have come from? It was not until he was but a few yards away that he recognized La Popote. Then his first impulse was to pass without speaking, but the lady had no intention of allowing this. She hailed him, grinning broadly as soon as he came within earshot. She was bare-headed, and by her dress seemed to have come directly from her work about the farm.

"Ohé, Wilbrod, how goes it? I am glad to see you, for I thought I would have to rest here the night, if I did not walk all the way home. Stop an instant, will you?"

Thus greeted, Wilbrod, with some misgiving, pulled in his horse.

"*Bonsoir, mam'selle Pop—Poitras,*" he said, in an uncertain voice. "What is it that you want?"

"Why, a drive home, to be sure," she answered cheerfully and climbed in, deaf to Wilbrod's feeble protest that he was only going a short distance. As he could not very well push her out of the rig, there was nothing to do but go on, so clucking to the animal he breathed a heartfelt prayer that they would meet no one on the road. To add to his embarrassment, it was obvious that La Popote had been partaking freely of spirituous liquors. Her breath recalled a still in full blast, and when she had risen from the roadside she made more than a suspicion of a stagger.

"You haven't much to say—yet I am told you are a great one for talking. You can't be timid driving with a girl—you, a handsome young chap!" La Po-

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pote accompanied this gambit with a sidelong glance . . . one of the most effective weapons in her arsenal of coquetry.

Wilbrod noted with some surprise that she had long, black lashes and a clear, merry brown eye—even though her face would have gained much by a thorough soaping. He had never seen her before at close range, though he had often—with the other bucks—eyed her in the offing; respectfully, as a lady of reputed virtuosity in the dark and thrilling arts of love.

“How did you happen to find yourself in this place?” he asked. “You are some distance from your home.”

La Popote laughed, a little ruefully.

“They played a dirty trick on me,” she confessed. “It was some young fellows in an automobile—young fellows that consider themselves very clever because they come from a town, and I am only a poor country girl.”

“What did they do, then?”

“Oh, they came to the farm—I am all alone there, at present. You know my brothers are away, working by day on the big dam on the Rivière Rouge. Well, these young devils came along, and they had one or two—I don’t know how many—bottles of whiskey. Not *whiskey blanc*, but stuff from the Commission of the Liquors! I have not often drunk it, and it was very good indeed. No matter. . . . They desired to amuse themselves . . . and I—well—never mind that! After an hour or so, they suggested they take

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me for a ride in their automobile, and I was very pleased, for I do not often have the chance. There were three of them. We drove for a while, stopping occasionally to taste the liquor. . . .”

“And to make love, no doubt,” interrupted Wilbrod, who was recovering his nerve.

“As for that, well, I don’t say. What would you have done?” La Popote eyed him archly, and moved closer.

The buggy seat wasn’t very wide. Wilbrod found the soft pressure of her thigh agreeable, and replied to the question that he, no doubt, would have done what the other young men did. La Popote laughed, and continued:

“Well, we arrived at that place where you found me, and I began to be a little tired of their amusement. I desired them to return me to my home. They wished to continue. I said no. One thing led to another, and in the end they bundled me out of the car and drove off, telling me I could get home by myself. The dirty children of dogs!”

“That was a mean trick! You would have had a long walk.”

“Fortunately, I made them give me the money before I consented to go with them. So it is not so bad as it might be. But I will not be caught like that again. *You* wouldn’t do a low trick like that on a poor girl, would you?”

Wilbrod swore that he could never be guilty of such base treatment of a lady.

“Then, *mon cher*,” continued La Popote, slipping

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a plump arm round the flustered Wilbrod's neck, "you will drive me right back to my house . . . is it not?" To beguile him further, she nuzzled him delicately behind the ear

"But—but, I must be home—My father sent me on an urgent errand—I would like to do what you ask, but——"

"Oh, very well, then," said La Popote, in a hard, dry voice. "I see you are like the rest—unkind to a poor girl that has been—well, unfortunate. What is the matter? Is it that you are afraid that someone will see me in your rig? Then they will say you have been committing I don't know what sins. . . . Is it not so?"

"But not at all! I do not care for that! They may say what they like! It is as I said—my father expects me home."

Wilbrod paused. La Popote moved away as far as she could on the seat and half turned her back to him. He capitulated.

"Very well, then. Never mind if my father is waiting. I will do what you ask."

"You needn't give yourself the trouble, M. Cabochin. I will get out when we reach the Tenth Range."

"Listen then, don't be foolish. I will be glad to take you home."

"No, that would never do—for the young saint, Wilbrod Cabochin, to be seen with a girl that is known to be debauched."

Wilbrod protested that she exaggerated her noto-

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riety . . . furthermore, that he was indifferent to what any of the parish gossips might say, and as a clincher, "It is now almost dark!"

La Popote kept silent for a minute or so, but finally laughed and edged over on the seat again.

"You have a good heart, Wilbrod. I did not think you would be really unkind."

They reached the junction of the Tenth Range with the Gosford highway, and Wilbrod turned off to the right. La Popote gave him a lusty hug and he shifted the reins to his right hand. His left arm encircled her waist. His biceps tightened and he felt a novel and triumphant pleasure in the pliant yielding of her body.

"Ouf!" she ejaculated. "But you are strong. . . . Listen now, you must not do that!" She seized the exploratory hand, and then, to offset this rebuff, lifted her face and received a kiss, very hot and earnest, but imperfectly executed. "You are a pretty boy, all the same."

For a time they were silent. Wilbrod's heart hammered and his hands felt clammy. For all his knowing talk when in the company of the young men of the village, he was still innocent. . . . In fact, his sexual experience had been very limited . . . the vicarious experience of books and movies, and the narratives of other, bolder fellows. In day-dreams and nocturnal visions, he had pictured himself in a situation where he could make his neophyte plunge into the whirlpools of passion, and always he had been

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enterprizing, masterful. Now, when he had the chance to turn his dreams to reality, he felt nothing of the confidence which he understood was essential for success. He knew what he wanted, but he found no words for the opening of the negotiations. He had his arm around a girl who was well known to be complaisant. Agreeable and diverting titillations which he should practise flitted through his mind, but he lacked the resolution to begin. His gaze was fixed straight to the front, where the horse's head jogged and nodded in the gathering gloom, and only from time to time did he dare a flickering glance at La Popote. To his concupiscent eyes, she possessed a magic allure; he marvelled that he had been blind to it before. The darkness helped the illusion, of course; the details of her dishevelled grubbiness were lost and only broad outlines remained—a lay figure, sensuously modelled, on which his imagination could hang every beauty and every grace.

When they had driven in silence for nearly a mile, La Popote yawned, and observed:

“*Diablo!* But I have hunger! Have you had your supper? No? Well, it will be long before you get back to the village: you can come in and have some tea and some eggs. What do you say to that?”

Wilbrod here found his tongue, and announced that while he had no desire for food, yet he was suffering severely from another form of hunger and would be in a terrible condition of anguish if he were not allowed to satisfy it. La Popote listened to his

pleadings first with astonishment, and then with indulgence. Finally, she said:

"Fie then! To talk of naughty doings! I can't figure to myself how you get such ideas. . . . Besides, you are much too young for those things!"

"I will show you presently if I am too young!"

"Now, now! I have heard brave words like these before from young boys. Wait until you have a growth of whiskers that one can perceive."

"To the devil with whiskers! What have whiskers to do with making love?"

"Saints hear him! But you have a terrible passion! I will be afraid. . . ."

"I will be gentle as a lamb! And I do not ask it for nothing. I will give you a present."

"A present? What sort of present?" La Popote found the boy's excitement amusing, but still, that was no reason for neglecting business.

"Here!" Grandly, Wilbrod produced a five dollar bill, extracted from his father with great difficulty that day—pocket-money, which would be expected to last for several weeks. He knew that La Popote's ordinary fee was less, but in his present state of mind economy was not to be considered.

La Popote hesitated, but he pressed the bill into her hand. She sighed, and transferred it to her stocking, a proceeding that still further aroused Wilbrod's ardor. She did not seem to have remarked its denomination. In the back of his mind had lurked a thought that she might offer him change; however, he

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did not feel like asking for it and perhaps imperilling the success of the negotiations. Besides, the instant's glimpse of a well-rounded thigh had set him ablaze.

"Oh, very well!" There was a tinge of sadness in La Popote's voice. "They are all the same, the men. Pigs, all of them. Pigs!"

Wilbrod laughed, nervously. She could not seriously mean this wholesale condemnation.

They arrived at the Poitras place—a miserable cluster of fields strewn with boulders, and unkempt with rotting stumps. Fifty yards or so from the road, on a little knoll, stood the house. It was a two-story structure, and seemed to be much higher than it was wide. It suggested a packing-case set on end. Vertical spruce boards, unplanned and unpainted, formed the exterior walls; the steep-pitched roof was covered with tarred felt. Banked earth around the foundations prevented the winter wind from sweeping under the floors. Curtainless windows and a home-made, battened door gave the impression of a human face with a blank, unseeing stare. A crazy, forlorn habitation.

Even had it been daylight, these aesthetic shortcomings would have meant nothing to Wilbrod. Why, indeed, should he be sensitive to ugliness? The type was precisely that of seven out of ten of the dwellings in the neighborhood, and even if its finish was more than ordinarily rough, well, everyone knew the Poitras boys were very poor; their farm would not support them, and they spent on it only a few

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months each year when there was no work in the woods or other day labor. It could not be expected that they would have an elegant mansion.

And La Popote? Well, what could she do? She looked after the three cows and the horse, spied on the scraggy hens to see where they had laid their eggs, fed the pig and tended the potato patch and garden. She had no time to make the place beautiful. Why should she, indeed? The nearest neighbor was half a mile away, and when visitors came, it was for only one reason. . . . It was not very often that she spoke to a woman.

The log cabin, which Poitras *père* had built when he first took up the land, had been converted into a stable, and the cows now sighed and chewed the cud in the room in which the pioneer and his wife had died.

Wilbrod tied the reins to a ring let into the wall beside the door and turned to follow La Popote, who had walked slowly up the hill to the new house. Her figure was just visible in the dusk. Wilbrod's breath came short; the blood burned in his cheeks and there was a drumming in his temples. In the heart-gripping silence, his thoughts seemed like the confused shouting of lascivious imps. . . .

"God! What an experience. . . . It will soon be over. . . . What a shape she has! . . . She is attractive. . . . *Maudit!* . . . What a lot she must know. . . . They say terrible things of her in the village. . . . *Maudit!* . . ."

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He reached the door and paused, gripping the jamb with either hand, feeling himself near to swaying. He must master this excitement—its violence almost terrified him. . . . Yet why should he be afraid? That was not the part of a man. He heard her moving about the room.

"Hast thou a match? Here, give me one and I will light the lamp." La Popote's voice was small but matter-of-fact. Wilbrod felt as if a cold hand had been laid on his back—she seemed so obviously uninterested. He made no move, and she went on:

"Hast thou lost the voice? Quick, then!"

"We do not need a light . . ." his voice was so hoarse the words could scarcely be distinguished. "We have no need of a light," he repeated, groping towards her. The last dim light from the western sky defined her form against the window, with the lamp in her hands. He set it down on the table.

Wilbrod hesitated on the stoop, while La Popote stood in the doorway, framed against the rectangle of light.

"*Maudit!*" she exclaimed, after an audible yawn, "but I am tired! It is not so very late, but all this running about . . . and foolery—that exhausts one!"

"Yes, that is so. As for me, I must hurry and get home. My father will be wondering what has become of me."

"What will you tell him? That you have been

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spending an hour with La Popote, *hein?*" she laughed, derisively.

"Oh, I'll make up some good yarn." Wilbrod hesitated, then opened with a rush—"You know, perhaps, that it was a *five-dollar* bill I gave you?" He hoped that the inflection would convey his meaning to her. He did not wish to be indelicate but now that he was calmer, the prospect of being without money for weeks was a little dismaying.

"Oh, was it? Well, that is very nice." La Popote sounded faintly appreciative, but on the whole indifferent. Her voice and air intimated plainly that she wished he would leave.

"I . . . I . . . they tell me, that perhaps . . . as an ordinary thing . . . you do not expect such a sum," he stammered.

La Popote's astonishment was either real or very well counterfeited.

"Oh, as for that—the money is nothing to me. I do not make much account of that," she observed, airily.

"Well then . . . seeing that such is the case . . . perhaps you will. . . ." Wilbrod found the going difficult, and came to a halt.

"What is it that you are trying to say, my little one? Are you asking me to give back your present? *Tiens*, that is not the part of a gallant! You surprise me!"

"Well then . . . but I shall have no money until next month."

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"Oh, pooh! You can easily ask your father for more. He is rich."

Wilbrod made an inarticulate sound of dissent, and remained standing on one foot, describing curves on the floor with the other.

"Well, you had better be going. It will be late before you get back. And I am tired. *Bonsoir!*" She partially closed the door and Wilbrod turned away with no further word. When he had taken a few steps, she relented.

"*Ecoute!* Wilbrod," she called, and when he halted, "some time, perhaps, you can come back and see me again. . . . You are a pretty boy. . . . Never mind the money for that time. . . ."

"*Merci*—perhaps." Wilbrod was curt. He continued on his way.

"And perhaps some time, if you wish it, you can stay all the night . . . for five dollars."

Wilbrod returned an "*Au revoir*," and took the proposition under advisement. As he untied the horse and started on the road back to Saint-Epistemon, he felt vaguely that he had been cheated—not in the matter of the five dollars . . . he told himself that if things had been as he expected, he would have thought nothing of the price, but . . . well, he was no longer innocent; he had known a woman. Many more years would pass, and many more women would gratify his desires before he would realize that disillusionment was the rule and not the exception; before he would learn that it is more delightful to desire than to have possessed. But now, the only explana-

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tion that presented itself was that La Popote, for all her reputation, could not give him what he expected; she was inert, casual, a drab. He would not go back.

In two weeks he returned, and thereafter, many times.

The principal facts he confessed to his father, when accused, but he swore that for months he had not seen the girl, and that furthermore she had never said anything to him of any unusual conditions. He protested that she could have no possible reason for naming him any more than five or six other men of the parish. Who these men were, Wilbrod thought he knew—but he had no evidence. Although to his father he disclaimed responsibility, to himself he acknowledged, bitterly, that there might perhaps be some ground. . . . The girl had obviously come to have an affection for him. . . . Here was a mess! But his parent was so furious, it would be better to admit nothing at all. The old man would, for all his storming, get him out of his predicament.

The old man did.

Next day, Wilbrod was shipped off to Trois Rivières, to stay with an uncle and work in his store.

M. Cabochin was engaged for the next week or so in collecting information as to the frequenters of the Poitras demesne. He even hired a private detective, who produced voluminous typewritten reports and went off after a week with a fat cheque. M. Cabochin could stand the expense no longer. He still had not

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enough definite information to be able to disprove the allegations which he believed La Popote might make, but he had certain intelligence that would render things very interesting for more than one important person in Saint-Epistemon. This would remain undivulged for the present, but if La Popote should make trouble for him—well, he would make trouble for other people. He had reason to believe that most of the parish knew the cause for Wilbrod's flight and were laughing at him. Very well, but some of them would find that Eusèbe Cabochin was not a person to be laughed at—not for long, or openly!

The detective's report had cost him close to a hundred dollars, but it was possible that the expenditure would bring in a return. Indeed, he thought, somewhat sadly, that if it were not for his own son being involved, he could have made a very good affair out of the document.



AND, GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY

CHAPTER VIII: VERDICT

MEANWHILE, the time for the trial of the Begin-Pouget slander case was drawing near, and interest was revived. The La Popote business took second place. It had promised to be enthralling, but nothing had happened; no one had even seen La Popote for weeks. Probably the dénouement would come, later. In the meantime, the feud between Onesiphore and Polycarpe was a more fertile field for speculation.

When it seemed there was no side to the topic that had not been thrashed out in every home and debated over at the popular meeting places, some new development would reawaken the excitement. Onesiphore had hardly shown himself since the great day when he had proved that it would take more than vague threats to stir him from the course of provo-

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cation that he had set out upon. He had taken to sending Madame Pouget to the village. His adherents were a little discouraged by this apparent evidence of faint-heartedness, but consoled themselves by saying that Onesiphore was a sly one and doubtless had something up his sleeve. A good many of them notwithstanding, thought he would be best advised to try to settle the case out of court. True, he might have to eat his words, but that would cost nothing, while the alternative—One Thousand Dollars! Why, he would have to sell the farm!

The most intriguing piece of news, and the sole circumstance with which the pro-Pouget party could buoy up their sinking hopes was that Herménégilde Pouget, Onesiphore's brother's son, who was an eminent *avocat* in Montreal, had consented to act as counsel for his uncle at the trial. There was a great impression created by this intelligence, although the exact significance of it was not appreciated until Athanase Duperrier explained the matter one day, at the Bedaud store.

"Perhaps something of which everyone in Saint-Epistemon is not aware is, that Herménégilde Pouget is entitled to write the letters C.R. after his name. And the words for which those initials stand are, '*Conseil du Roi!*' That means that when the King goes to Court, when he has a case at law for any reason—and that happens often enough, I assure you—he will call on Herménégilde Pouget to be his lawyer!"

"Doubtless Herménégilde gets well paid?"

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"Why, of course," answered Athanase. "But the fine thing is the honor."

"Well, to think of that! And I remember him as just a little dirty-faced boy, running round the streets, here," mused T  l  mache.

"Well, I tell you something. With a smart lawyer like that, perhaps Polycarpe will not have it all his own way. Those lawyers, they have means of getting round things one would not believe. . . ."

So in speculation and argument, the remaining time before the great day passed.

The fifteenth of March dawned on a sleepless village, and eight o'clock saw a stream of sleighs, each loaded far below the plimsoll line, in steady procession towards Harrietville. It would be well to be early, for the court room was small, and there would not be seats for all who wished to hear the *cause c  l  bre*. And indeed, by ten o'clock, the officers of the Court were refusing admission, not without reason, for any living skeleton would have been hard put to find a place within the doors.

The spectators waited patiently while an uninteresting and seemingly interminable case was being tried, but at length the great moment was at hand. One could almost hear the Saint-Epistemonois listening.

M. Cabochin rose. It was the day of days for him. He could not remember a case in which public attention had been so concentrated. It was sure to be reported in the Montreal papers! And he was so con-

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fidant of winning! He permitted himself a triumphant glance towards the Pougets, sitting at the table opposite; Onesiphore with his everlasting and disquieting grin, and Herménégilde with a shadow of mockery showing through professional gravity. Laugh, did he? Well, he would laugh in a different manner when the case was over and the verdict given.

"My Lord, and Gentlemen of the Jury—" M. Cabochin paused for an infinitesimal space to savor the delightful experience of having the attention of everyone rivetted upon him . . . he was in the position of a gunner who has fired the first shell of a classic battle . . . "the case which I have to plead before you is one the justice of which is so patent that I shall not waste time in declaiming upon what is obvious to you all! I shall prove, by unimpeachable evidence, that over a long period of time, and with the most malicious intent, the defendant, Onesiphore Pouget. . . ."

Once launched, M. Cabochin's forensic eloquence gathered momentum rapidly, and in spite of the declaration that he would be brief, there were very few who did not feel, when at length he called his first witness, that he had given a very generous sample of his skill in argument, indeed.

Polycarpe Begin took the stand, was sworn, and composed himself for the examination of his counsel. This was the greatest moment of his life. His wandering gaze encountered that of Onesiphore. The old reprobate . . . he still grinned! He leaned over and whispered something to Herménégilde—Polycarpe

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could not hear what, but he had a villainous suspicion that. . . . But, no, he would not think of it . . . he would think of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS. *There* was a thought to soothe ruffled feelings!

“Monsieur Begin, how long have you known the defendant?”

The examination was on. He would have to pay careful attention, now. Everyone in the Court kept their eyes fixed on his face. As the examination proceeded, the strained attention relaxed slightly. When he mentioned the word “Wabache” for the first time, there was a distinct snicker, quickly hushed. Rapidly the climax came, and, prompted by M. Cabochin, he recounted in a dramatic tone the final insult.

“That is all the evidence from this witness, My Lord,” said the *avocat*, and sat down.

Herménégilde rose to cross-examine. He stood quite silent for a moment, smiling in a tolerant fashion. There was a faint echo of Onesiphore’s intimidating rictus in his expression. Then he spoke, and Polycarpe felt the first dim stirrings of uneasiness.

“M. Begin, what meaning is conveyed to you by the word ‘Wabache’?”

“Why . . . I don’t care to say . . .” stammered Polycarpe.

“Answer the question, sir!”

“But I cannot oblige you. . . . There are some things with which one would not like to soil one’s mouth! This much I will say. . . . It means something of a very great dirtiness!”

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"What grounds have you for supposing any such thing?"

Polycarpe countered, angrily. "Why should he call me that if it did not mean something dirty? I tell you, Herménégilde—*pardon, monsieur*—I should say M. Pouget, that it is so dam' dirty there is no one in the whole village that knows what it *does* mean!"

"You admit you do not know what it means?"

"Well, not exactly! Not to put it into so many words."

"All right! That is all I have to say to you."

Here, the learned Judge was observed to lean over to the Prothonotary and whisper something. The Prothonotary shook his head, looked in a helpless fashion through the dictionary, and then his hands strayed uncertainly towards the book of Holy Writ that lay on the desk before him. The Judge looked up and stared solemnly at Herménégilde, then at M. Cabochin, then at Polycarpe. Polycarpe stared at Onesiphore. M. Cabochin stared at Herménégilde and then at Polycarpe. He had been attacked from a direction to which he had never given a thought. He could not rally his forces.

"H-m . . . h-m . . ." the Judge rumbled. "Will someone enlighten the Court as to the meaning of this allegedly opprobrious term, 'Wabache'?"

His searching glance travelled all round the chief actors in the drama and then swept the crowds of spectators on the benches. But no pair of eyes that met his own held a message of illumination.

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"H-m . . . h-m . . . it seems very strange that no one should know the meaning of this, h-m, epithet, about which there is so much noise. Did I understand you to say that the defendant never applied any other term of abuse to you?"

"No . . . that is . . . not that I think of at this instant."

His Lordship turned with an inscrutable expression to Onesiphore.

"What, sir," he demanded, "is the exact nature of the characteristic implied in the term 'Wabache'?"

Herménégilde nudged his uncle sharply, and the elder Pouget got to his feet. His lips were decorously composed but his eyes gleamed with malicious humor. Polycarpe watched him, uneasily.

"Monsieur," said Onesiphore, "you have put to me a question that I cannot answer. I have no words like Your Lordship, and my learned nephew here, Herménégilde. I say that Polycarpe is 'Wabache,' because he is. . . ." The overworked French shoulder explained the meaning to its owner's satisfaction. But not so, the Court.

"Is what? What *is* 'Wabache'? Answer me?"

"But . . . er . . . it is nothing!" replied Pouget, with an air of shamefaced helplessness. "I made it up! It is a word without sense or significance—the same as Polycarpe, himself. Wabache means Wabache!" he said, again, and grinned openly at his gaping opponent. "*C'est tout, monsieur!*"

His Lordship assumed an expression of utmost ferocity, glared at M. Cabochin, glared at the emi-

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ment *C.R.*, shifted his position to include the Gentlemen of the Jury, who gaped at him like a row of somnolent frogs, and then broke into uncontrollable laughter. The Court immediately echoed the sound, until the rafters rang. Never had such a scene been enacted in the county. Never perhaps in Montreal, or Quebec. It was demoniacal.

When at last, like a hurricane the merriment subsided, His Lordship gathered his robes about him, resumed his accustomed dignity, and pronounced:

"As no libel by the defendant had been disclosed, I withdraw this case from the Jury and declare the action dismissed!"

A week after the unexpected and disastrous defeat in the lists of the law, M. Cabochin promenaded the Main Street of Saint-Epistemon, scowling stonily at all who greeted him, as if daring them to allow the slightest hint of mockery to become apparent. None but grave looks met his gaze, principally because he was creditor to many of the villagers and they stood greatly in awe of him. After he had passed, however . . . well, that was a different matter.

M. l'avocat was still extremely sore, and only wished for an opportunity to discharge his bitterness at someone. He was soon to find a victim.

A rickety buggy whirled past, driven at what, considering the age and infirmity of the equipage, was a perilous speed. An hilarious voice screeched: "*Bonjour, Monsieur Cabochin. Comment ça va?*"

Monsieur stared. La Popote! None other! And

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obviously intoxicated. . . . Such impudence! Such brazen impertinence. . . . Positively insupportable!

He wheeled in time to see her pull up at the store, and run somewhat unsteadily up the steps. M. Cabochin was not fifty yards away and could see her very plainly, and what he saw filled him with amazement. Could he believe his eyes? He would investigate more closely and see if his vision had been defective. Closing his mouth with a snap, he walked rapidly towards the *Magasin Bedaud*.

He had just reached the steps when La Popote emerged—a tin in one hand and a paper bag in the other. She saw him at once, and eyed him with a broad grin. Then, perceiving the direction of his gaze, she burst into a peal of laughter, and . . . the hussy . . . stuck out her tongue!

Laughing still, she climbed into the buggy and drove off.

M. Cabochin could only gape at her. What an astonishing creature! He could not understand. . . . Most of all perhaps, was he puzzled by her blush—a distinct blush—that did not seem to harmonize with the character of laughter.

“What?” spluttered M. Cabochin, to himself. “Why. . . ?”

The whole case filled him with the utmost confusion.

By the time La Popote had disappeared, his mind was in a turmoil. He did not know whether to be relieved or infuriated. But one thing he resolved: he would get to the bottom of this affair, and that with-

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out delay. Wearing a grim air, he entered the store.

"Télémache," he began, in a grating voice, "I desire to discuss an important matter with you. Will you have the goodness to step outside?"

Télémache, astonished, but preserving his usual air of impassivity, complied. The two men walked down the street past the church. The loafers in the store hurried out to the verandah, unashamedly watching them and discussing among themselves what the lawyer could possibly want of Télémache Bedaud.

M. Cabochin looked about, and satisfied that there was no possibility of being overheard, ominously began:

"Télémache, two months ago you informed me that La Popote was *enceinte*. Today, I see her, and she is no more *enceinte* than I am!"

Télémache shrugged his shoulders.

M. Cabochin made no secret of his irritation. "It is all very well," said he, "for you to hunch yourself up like a hedgehog, but that will not pass with me. I desire an explanation."

"It is true, what you say, M. Cabochin. I was astounded myself. There is nothing wrong with the girl. But I give you my word, when I saw her that day before I spoke to you, her figure was, *bien*—I would have sworn to it."

"Humph! Well, there is another matter. You told me that a man had informed you my Wilbrod was responsible. *Who was that man?*"

"M. Cabochin, I told you at the time that I was

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sworn not to reveal his name. What is more, I do not care for the tone in which you see fit to address me. I am not in the witness box—I am no criminal!”

“Oh, so we are to be upon our dignity, *hein?* I think you will change your ideas in a minute. Listen carefully to this, M. Bedaud. . . . After you had delivered yourself of your alarming intelligence to me, naturally I sought to protect myself. To this end, I employed a detective to discover something of the habits of that woman—also to find out those who were her frequent patrons.”

Télémaché cast down his gaze and shifted his feet, uneasily.

“Proceed, M. Cabochin,” he said, more mildly. “But please make haste. I cannot leave the store for long.”

“I shall not detain you long. My detective reported to me that one Télémaché Bedaud had, to his certain knowledge, paid two visits to the Poitras house, and was reputed to be in the habit of doing so, often. Now, then. . . .”

“It is a lie!” cried Télémaché. Nevertheless, his face blanched.

“I shall not attempt to convict you, monsieur. I think, however, this would be a subject in which Madame Bedaud might conceivably take some interest.”

Of this there was not the slightest doubt. Mme Bedaud was known to be the possessor of the sharpest tongue in the parish, and rumor had it that her arm did not lack strength. Télémaché was not a very

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powerful man. Though he was reputed to be the richest man, next to the *avocat* and Osias Patelin, many averred that they would not change places with him, if his spouse went with his income.

"What do you want with me, then?" he replied sullenly, knowing that the game was up.

"What I said. Who told you the tale about Wilbrod having got La Popote that way?"

"Onesiphore."

M. Cabochin was stupefied. There was nothing more to be said. Télémache contemplated him grimly—he had been so hot on getting the name . . . now, he did not seem to care so much for it, after all! The *avocat* recovered himself sufficiently to mumble his thanks, turned abruptly and strode off.

Télémache returned slowly to the store, his eyes fixed on the ground. He felt himself on the edge of a volcano . . . if Margot should hear. . . . *Dieu!* He trembled. But perhaps so long as he did not antagonize the lawyer—and there was no reason for him to do that—fatal consequences might be averted.

The *curé* would have commended the earnestness of his sudden prayer!

Gall and wormwood flavored the thoughts of the lawyer. He perceived it all, now. The missing link in the mystery was clearly revealed. Onesiphore Pouget was the cousin of the dead Poitras, father of the girl. It was a relationship of which, naturally, he did not care to boast, but this time, the old devil had turned it to account. He had gone to her and persuaded her to play this trick, and then had primed

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Télémache Bedaud—a notorious gossip—on whom he could rely to carry the tale to Eusèbe Cabochin, a man of integrity and position. It had been clever . . . fiendishly clever. He had been fooled; he had suffered anguish, and a heavy expense.

M. Cabochin, who by now had reached the open country, halted and shook a withered fist in the direction of the Pouget *terre*.

“Old scoundrel! Three times have you fooled me! You may laugh now, but one of these days. . . . No man can laugh at Eusèbe Cabochin, and enjoy it!”

Nevertheless, the whole parish did so, and no holocaust overtook them!



SHOULD REMARK THE MODEST BEHAVIOR

CHAPTER IX: STRATAGEM

BIEN, Onesiphore, you have there a car of the most elegant, and at a price altogether ridiculous," concluded Osias Patelin, folding away the bills in his pocket-book. "I wish you good-day, and much pleasure in your new machine."

Onesiphore Pouget shook his head, endeavoring to prevent an expression of pride and satisfaction from displacing the sombre dubiety he had assumed for bargaining purposes. The transaction, which had endured for several weeks, had been very closely contested, and though he had paid a trifle more than he wished, he had not been very grossly swindled. This much he deduced from the evident anguish with which Patelin had reduced his price until the final settlement was reached.

The vendor turned to the waiting Ford and an impish idea came to him.

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“With that machine, Onesiphore,” he shouted above the whirring engine, “you could make your fortune at the bootlegging! Of such a speed it is! *Au revoir, mon vieux!*”

Onesiphore but half heard the sprightly jest. Pate-lin had talked so much during the process of bargaining, that he fell into the habit of giving but scant attention to the words. Now that he was alone, he permitted his grim mouth to relax; the corners came up, the lips opened slightly until the feature became a sable crescent. His scraggly grey whiskers seemed to curl and take on a waggish aspect; the lids drooped over the piercing black eyes until they were mere twinkling slits. In a word, he was pleased and was showing it. He had long desired an automobile, and at length had achieved his ambition. The next move, obviously, was to be seen driving the glorious chariot; to excite approbation, and perhaps envy.

It was with a thrill that he settled himself in the driver's seat, spun the motor, and with infinite precaution let in the clutch. His heart was leaping in his breast as he swung into the highway, and he even opened his throat—for many years unpractised in song.

“Alouette, gentille alouette. . . .”

By the greatest of luck, neighbor Polycarpe Begin was leaning over his gate. They were not good friends, it is true, but Onesiphore felt that after his brilliant victory in the matter of the lawsuit, he could afford to be magnanimous—to the extent of allowing Polycarpe to be the first to envy his new purchase.

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So he pulled up opposite the gaping M. Begin, and the two regarded each other for an instant.

"Well, Polycarpe," observed Onesiphore, "it is fine weather, is it not?"

"*Ah! Sacré!* Then it *is* true, what they say . . . that you have bought a car," burst out Polycarpe, disregarding Onesiphore's conventional opening.

"*Bien!* so I have! These days one must have a car, not to be behind the age."

"Well, maybe! For me, I prefer to put my money into improvements on my farm. . . . My old Babette can carry me where I wish to go. . . . Though truly, it is a convenience and most pleasant to have an auto," concluded Polycarpe, generously.

"Perhaps you will have the time for a short promenade as far as the village?" invited the prideful owner, throwing open the door.

Polycarpe accepted with alacrity, and Saint-Epistemon, that night, had two astonishing and intriguing events to discuss—first, that Onesiphore had bought a car, and second, that he had taken Polycarpe Begin, who but a short time ago had been his bitterest enemy, for the first ride in it!

Owning a motor car was all very well, thought Onesiphore, nearly a month later, but it did cost dear! He had just been engaged in totalling the various sums spent for the maintenance of the new acquisition, and had been horrified to find that twenty-two dollars and thirty-seven cents had passed imperceptibly from his pocket into that of Hilaire

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Letellier, the blacksmith and garageman of Saint-Epistemon. At this rate, reflected Onesiphore, gloomily, it would not be long before the entire proceeds of the hay crop were absorbed by the cursed contraption. And the devil of it was, that it brought him nothing in return! He could not even make an odd dollar by livery work; no one in Saint-Epistemon ever wanted to go anywhere, and if they did, they would rather walk than pay for a conveyance. A set of miserly unprogressives! What Madame Pouget, who had been opposed to the car from the start, would say when she learned of its insatiable appetite for gasoline and oil, was a speculation upon which Onesiphore was reluctant to dwell.

If he could only offer himself some justification, some prospect, however remote, that it might one day be the means of making an honest penny! If he could have one argument, even a weak one, with which to stem the tide of Mme. Pouget's recriminations! Long hours he brooded over his troubles, until, like miasmatic mist arising from a swamp, they blurred his entire horizon, and life grew exceedingly dark and drear.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he would groan, with an apprehensive glance in his wife's direction, "what shall I do when she learns the truth?"

At last, when his spirits were at their lowest ebb, the saving notion took form. What had Osias Patelin remarked as he drove away, leaving this thrice-damned white elephant on his hands? The bootlegging, had he suggested? Onesiphore, slouching glum-

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ly in the barn, looked uneasily about. The bootlegging, indeed!

Doubtless Osias had intended to be amusing. Perhaps he had mocked his customer, but there was something to be said for the idea. . . . Yes. . . . Osias probably thought he was being smart, but after all, these people who are so liberal with their jests, sometimes are guilty of ideas that a genius can turn to account. This bootlegging, now. . . . Onesiphore, *in extremis*, clutched at anything that resembled salvation . . . anything that would offer a little revenue and save the returns of the hay crop from obliteration.

Once given a starting point, he found his mind functioning with a delightful power and ease. The points of the problem were no sooner perceived than solved. Point the first. . . . Where to get the liquor? A bottle or two—that was an easy matter, for one had only to send a money order to the *Commission des Liqueurs* at Quebec and the joyous fluid would arrive by the next post. But this was not a matter of bottles. Cases would be required.

A thought struck him. Hercule Begin lived in Montreal. It appeared that this young gentleman was unhampered by a position, since an unfortunate difference with his last employers, and Onesiphore had no doubt but that he would be quite agreeable to picking up a little money, especially when there was required of him no risk and no exertion. Living in the metropolis, he would be easily able to procure

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the illicit merchandise, and for his trouble he would receive a small commission.

So far, so good.

Point the second. . . . To whom should it be sold? Obviously, to the ever-thirsty Americans. And how smuggled across the border? . . . In the anguish of concentration, M. Pouget caught his head between his hands and squeezed it. Everything depended upon his ability to recall certain transactions related by the nephew of M. Patelin, the expert mechanic, who had been invited to the *maison* Pouget for quite a different purpose. It was with the hope of overcoming his shrewd secretiveness, and persuading him to discourse frankly upon the *true* merits of the Overbaker, that young M. Latulippe had been pressed to drink several glasses of *whiskey blanc*. The scheme was in a sense, a failure, for while Latulippe was indeed most talkative, he had refused to talk of the things Onesiphore wished to know, and confined his remarks instead to reminiscences of bootlegging.

He had told with great detail, giving the exact location of roads and rendezvous, how for months on end he had conveyed a cargo of contraband liquors and wines nightly to the border, where he had been met by adventurous Yankees, in all sorts of vehicles, and had handed over his load for spot cash and a profit of one hundred per cent. A fine trade! No risk . . . quick returns! Why he had given it up was not made very clear. He became rather incoherent at

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this portion of his story and muttered darkly of sacred pigs of avaricious detectives, some colossal bungling on the part of someone, made a cryptic remark about women being the root of all evil, and concluded with a long-drawn-out lamentation about the wreck of his car and the loss of a great part of his capital.

At the time, Onesiphore had chafed under this babbling, but now he felt that the innumerable glasses of whiskey consumed by M. Latulippe were but a moderate exchange for the information given. As the incidents occurred to him, he became convinced that once in possession of the liquor, he would know exactly how and where to dispose of it.

As for the capital required for this venture, he would provide half himself, and persuade Polycarpe Begin to put up the remainder. They would go on even shares, both as to investment and returns, Polycarpe throwing in the services of Hercule to balance the use of Onesiphore's car. With a sigh of relief at the conclusion of so stupendous a feat of cogitation, M. Pouget arose and set forth to seek his neighbor.

Polycarpe was discovered hoeing potatoes. In response to urgent beckoning, he left this wearisome task, repaired to the pleasant shade of a maple, and was soon listening with open mouth to a masterly exposition of the profit-threatening speculation. At the end, he was lost in admiration. He began by thanking Onesiphore profusely for giving him this matchless opportunity to enrich himself without toil

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or risk. Indeed, the scheme had a most alluring flavor. In imagination, Polycarpe beheld himself the owner of a car, somewhat finer than Onesiphore's . . . engaging in the traffic for himself. . . . He was recalled from this pleasant vision by Onesiphore's suggestion that he should write Hercule without delay, to find out whether that young man-about-town would be able to play his part.

"But certainly, Onesiphore, by the very next post. I know without waiting for the reply, however, that Hercule will impress himself to do what is necessary. He is of a knowing nature, that one! The heredity, for example. . . . But indeed, I will go now to the house and compose a letter. Perhaps you would care to come and assist? Then it would be correct for sure!"

Onesiphore averred that he had every confidence in his friend's epistolary powers, and after a solemn plea for secrecy . . . "Not a word to a person . . . not even to the good Madame Begin . . . is it understood?" . . . took his departure.

The five days that elapsed before Hercule's reply was received were very tense. Neither Onesiphore nor Polycarpe was able to think of anything other than the fascinating project. They met with an elaborate air of unconcern two or three times a day, on which occasions they would gaze upon one another solemnly, savoring to the full, the delightful sensation of conspiracy. Mesdames Pouget and Begin were driven almost insane by the unprovoked chucklings, inscrutable smiles, mysterious hints of affluence to

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come, and nervous outbursts of irritability on the part of their respective husbands.

At length, the letter arrived. Polycarpe, heedless of his wife's frantic demands to know the contents, rushed down the road to the Pouget *ménage*, holding the document in his hand. He was much upset, as was attested by a violently-rolling eye, and the fragmentary and ill-considered imprecations that floated in his wake. Mme Begin also departed in the other direction—to the home of the Ouimets, where she hoped to receive muchneeded sympathy and advice. Polycarpe was becoming really intolerable.

Onesiphore perceived his neighbor's approach from a distance and rising abruptly from the table when only half through his repast (a circumstance which Mme Pouget declared had never been known in all the days of their married life) hastened to meet him. Discomfiting was the news conveyed. Hercule indeed, could obtain the liquor, but he had it on the best authority that the location suggested for its disposal was now desert, save for prowling provincial detectives, and certain disgusting Federal prohibition enforcement agents of the United States. The *affaire* had been once a very fine one, but it had been too good to last. Other methods were now in vogue, it appeared. Hercule claimed to have had many friends who ministered to the needs of the thirsty citizens of the Republic. He had long desired to undertake a similar occupation himself, but lack of funds had proved an insurmountable obstacle. He was most enthusiastic over the plan in general, and

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spoke vaguely of going ahead and trusting to the inspiration of the moment for getting the goods to the consumer. He said he would use his best endeavors to find out how it was now being done. As much liquor as ever was going out, he was convinced, but though his friends in the business were fine, frank fellows in general, they preserved their trade secrets very carefully. He begged that his respected father would forward by return post an order for the funds necessary to buy the goods, so that no time should be lost when they hit on a plan.

This indeed was a facer. Onesiphore and Polycarpe found themselves unanimous in the decision not to send any money to Hercule until some feasible plan for disposing of the liquor was in sight. As Polycarpe observed, they could not afford to put temptation in his way.

After a melancholy conference, they decided that nothing was to be done for the present, except to write Hercule again, and instruct him to redouble his efforts to find out the up-to-date procedure in the most exclusive rum-running circles. Meanwhile, as Onesiphore said, they would bend their minds to the solution of the problem, "with a concentration altogether intense!" They clasped hands as a symbol of determination to succeed together, and parted.

Their good wives found their behavior for the next week even more trying. Mme Begin, after spending the best part of a morning listening to Polycarpe pacing up and down the barn, muttering unintelligible phrases spiced with the most astound-

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ingly profane combinations, and wearing a face (so far as she was able to judge by spying through the cracks) whereon profound gloom alternated with the most spiteful rage, decided she could stand it no longer, and fled to Mme Ouimet. After a consultation, Dr. Morin was called, and that afternoon the physician, supported by the wife of the supposed *aliéné* and her faithful neighbors, gingerly approached the Begin farmhouse. By a discreet reconnaissance, Polycarpe was located in the kitchen, sitting down, "somewhat melancholy, but not in a furore, as one might say." Dr. Morin bravely ventured in, the others listening with all their ears, and ready to fly at the first sign of impending danger.

This was not long in coming. After Polycarpe's first civil, if surprised, greeting, his voice rose in pitch and volume, until Onesiphore, three hundred yards away, working in his turnip-field, could almost follow the conversation.

M. Begin enquired with emphasis, if *M. le Docteur* supposed he was a species of baboon, to be stared at? If so, why did he not pay his admission, as was customary when viewing apes in captivity? When gentlemen honored him with a visit, he expected that they would give some account of themselves, and not stare like a cow that has wandered, by mistake, into the Mass! He suggested that *M. le Docteur* had taken advantage of his power to issue prescriptions for *spiritus frumenti* to obtain large quantities of that potent compound which, consumed, had robbed him of what modest faculties he had

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formerly possessed. And finally, he invited him to take himself to some other *milieu*, preferably distant, the denizens of which would find the spectacle of one who had the eyes and mouth of a cod-fish, and the nose of a hedgehog, pleasing to contemplate!

Dr. Morin departed, his cheeks a violent purple, and expressing his opinion that M. Begin was not exactly insane but "a trifle disquieted about something." He prescribed tact on the part of Mme Begin, supplemented by copious doses of castor oil. That harassed lady flatly declared to Mme Ouimet that she would as soon offer a spoonful of Holy Water to the devil, and begged that she might be afforded an asylum beneath the Ouimet roof, lest Polycarpe should have the sin of uxoricide upon his soul. This request was willingly granted.

Full of his latest grievance against the doctor, and the accumulated heart-sickness of a week's tussle with a problem that evaded solution, Polycarpe ambled down for his customary conference with Onesiphore. But M. Pouget forestalled him.

"Consider, Polycarpe," cried the neighbor, "how I have troubles beyond imagining! Is it not enough that I worry myself into a state where I don't know where I am . . . that I do not eat, nor sleep . . . or scarcely at all, which is the same thing . . . because of trying to discover a money-making scheme to please my wife and daughter, to buy them dresses, fallals, and what other foolishness I do not know. . . . But what is it now that has to happen? Mathilde, that great idiot, has taken it into her head

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that nothing will do but that she must become a nun! Mind, my friend, I do not charge you with this calamity, altogether! No doubt young Hercule proved to you, as Mathilde is proving to me, that the children of this day entirely lack a sense of duty. But I ask, heard you ever anything of such a resemblance? And what is more, Zéphyrine, my wife, that should know better at her age, agrees with the girl! She says to get a husband for Mathilde is a terrible task . . . no living young man can come up to that girl's ideas, so therefore she may as well be off to the convent! I ask you to consider for only a moment, the money I have spent on her upbringing! The food she has eaten! My friend, it would astonish you . . . the appetite of my daughter. If the Mother Superior should see her at the table, she would think twice about putting such a tax on the resources of the Church. Not, you understand, but that she would have made Hercule a good, obedient wife. . . . And dresses! Why, it is not a year ago she had her silk dress made over by Mlle Potvin. . . . All this expenditure is to bring me no return . . . deserted in my old age . . . after I had, with great pains, taught her to milk the cow, and she can assist to dispatch the pig like any man. . . . I cannot tell you how it distresses me. . . . And in such fashion the idea came to her! Figure to yourself, because she sees a nun riding in a motor car, therefore *she* must be a nun! I ask myself, whether it is possible to conceive of anything more imbecile?"

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Immediately after the words "riding in a motor car" struck his ear, a hitherto unprecedented phenomenon occurred—Polycarpe had an original idea. Here, in a brilliant flash, was revealed the solution they had so long sought. He interrupted the current of his friend's sad reflections on the ingratitude of the young, almost incoherent with excitement.

"Onesiphore, my old one, you have hit upon it! A scheme of the most magnificent; impossible of failure! In brief, this. . . . You shall drive the car. Hercule and I, we sit in the back, habited as nuns. Ho, ho! Who would think to disturb a holy nun to look for whiskey, *hein?* No one! We tell our rosaries, we cast down our eyes, you drive on past the policeman. Then, once over the border, we meet our American, we sell him the alcohol and go back another way!"

Onesiphore was speechless. Was the man mad? What an idea! Perhaps he was making fun! He turned and strode away.

Polycarpe, however, was not to be put off. He trotted along, arguing, urging the practicability of the plan . . . how absolutely sure-fire, and eventually sheered off with the injunction to Onesiphore to sleep on it.

Polycarpe had considerable difficulty in persuading his wife to return and cook dinner for him, in spite of which he continued in good spirits until the meeting with his fellow-conspirator, next day. He discovered that Onesiphore was not yet converted, but was willing to argue the merits of the proposal.

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Therefore they discussed the pros and cons for two long hours. At the end, it was decided to put it to the test if Hercule could be sure of having a definite purchaser. And that very afternoon, (fortune was indeed smiling on them now) a letter from Begin *fils* announced he had a customer in view, who would meet them on the American side upon receipt of a code telegram. Hercule was as usual, vague as to methods, but he asked again for cash to buy the liquor, and urged that delay would be fatal.

Once launched on the enterprize, the partners acted with decision. A letter containing full instructions and a postal order for a staggering sum, was dispatched to Hercule's address.

"I hope he is not troubled with a dry throat, himself," remarked Onesiphore, with admirable caution, as he moistened the flap of the envelope.

Preparations were made for an immediate departure, and before dawn on the following morning, Polycarpe and Onesiphore were well on their way to Montreal. The drive was not altogether hilarious, for Onesiphore felt his doubts as to the success of the stratagem reviving. Polycarpe, finding his efforts to promote a higher morale received with chilling indifference, relapsed into what he conceived to be an attitude of Napoleonic determination. The ingenuity to conceive, he reflected, was of little use unless accompanied by the will to execute, and he could not understand the doubts that beset his friend in considering the matter of disguise.

"For you, I tell you, *mon ami*, the thing would be

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impossible! Your face is of a character that supports a beard; but even so handsome an adornment is not, you will admit, suitable to the visage of a Holy Sister. On the other hand, me and my Hercule . . . well, it is different. With the complexion that is innocent of hairs, I assure you, Onesiphore, it will be but the matter of a *coiffe* to convert us into *religieuses*. And you, yourself, I doubt not, will be amazed to see with what ease the transformation will be achieved. *C'est ça!"*



WHAT WILL YOU BOOTLEGGERS THINK UP NEXT

CHAPTER X: CONSEQUENCES

NEITHER of the men had been to Montreal before, and they were open-mouthed with astonishment at the vast extent of the city whose limits were lost in a pall of smoke. Behind the tall buildings and spires of the lower town, terraced dwellings rose and the green humps of the twin mountains crowned all. An ocean liner manœuvred to its berth in the basin, assisted by snorting tugs, and on the bridge long freight and passenger trains roared past them. The road traffic was a dense stream in both directions, for Victoria was the only bridge across the St. Lawrence for many miles, and the tourist season was at its height.

Reaching the North Shore, they churned cautiously through cobbled streets past the canal, to Bonaventure Station. There, Polycarpe got out and

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wandered about gaping, until he was hailed by his son, who as arranged was to meet them there. Onesiphore's stiffness of greeting was only natural, for he could not entirely forget that the lad had put a slight on the Pouget family by his shameless jilting of Mathilde. Still, he told himself that he must conceal his feelings. It would not do to have disagreements. The enterprize they were engaged in needed whole-hearted co-operation and strict attention to the matter in hand.

Hercule had a new and jaunty air. It was astonishing how all the distinguishing signs of the clodhopper had disappeared—and after little more than half a year's residence in the Canadian metropolis. It was not only his clothes—assembled in the latest mode of the Craig Street ready-made tailors and haberdashers—but in his manner of walking, standing; his speech; everything! Polycarpe wondered that this brilliant butterfly could be the young caterpillar that had crawled away from the home parish. He must have done well for himself when he was working. Such an air! Polycarpe was divided between pride and regret—regret for the few dollars contributed to Hercule's support during the periods when his talents had not found appreciation. Why, the boy must have made colossal wages!

Starting as a car-washer in a garage, he proceeded, helped by his country education which had not taught him to shun work so successfully as the majority of the city youths, to casual employment

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as a mechanic's assistant. Shortly, he hoped to handle a car sufficiently well to become a taxi-driver. He had a promise of a taxi when he could pass the examination.

Sitting in the front seat of Onesiphore's car, he guided them to his boarding house. He quite took command of the expedition and did not omit to reprove Onesiphore when the old man contravened the traffic regulations. To conduct a car in Montreal was a different matter from chugging up and down the country roads, he observed. Onesiphore was too intent upon his task and too bewildered by the vehicles that rushed at him from all directions and the pedestrians who seemed bent on suicide, to reply suitably to Hercule's impertinences. Polycarpe's heart was in his mouth—first, when a collision would be averted by scant inches, and again when Hercule would roundly condemn the driver for his lack of skill. An angel—or possibly St. Christopher, patron saint of autoists—watched over them however, and they arrived safely at Hercule's temporary abode.

No doubts clouded the calm confidence of the young adventurer. He was bubbling over with importance and *élan*. Arrived in his room, he opened the cupboard door and displayed several solid-looking cases with well-known names burned on the fresh, clean pine.

"*Regardez!*" he said, with a gesture.

Polycarpe rubbed his hands.

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"There, *mon fils*," he said, "is the precious cargo by which we shall attain opulence."

"Or a Yankee jail," amended Onesiphore, hollowly.

"Not the least chance," Polycarpe cut in. Then, turning to his son: "What of the costumes, Hercule, my boy? When do we become two sacred nuns?"

Hercule's gesture disposed of all anxiety on that and every other score.

"I am not one to forget things," he declared, grandiloquently. "At the *Costumier du Théâtre*, I have procured two *masques* which lie there, under the bed, and which, my father, we will adopt so soon as we are clear of the city. Have no fear! I have seen to everything!"

Polycarpe turned to his friend.

"There, you see! Hercule has left nothing undone. *Mon Dieu!* You show an outrageous pessimism! But I have the cure for that!" Here Polycarpe winked. "I perceive that we have a bottle not encased. As there are some hours before it will be dark enough to load our freight, let us then drink to the success of our venture! Who can say we are not entitled to a little something to make us of a good cheer?"

This motion, finding no dissident voices, was carried. A corkscrew and three glasses were forthcoming, and in a minute's time, three "*Saluts*," were followed by an impressive gurgling.

"That's something of a quality very fine and well worth the money we shall get for it," said Polycarpe, smacking his lips and reaching for the bottle.

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His example was followed in silence by the others. After the second libation, a little pause fell. It was broken by Hercule, who felt as host, that the burden of leading the conversation fell upon him.

"Since coming to Montreal, I speak the English in a manner very elegant," he remarked.

"I s'pose maybe you speak him mos' as good as your *père*, now?" demanded Polycarpe.

"'Mos' as good? Dam sight bettaire! I got a smooth line of chat!"

"Me, I don' like that slang *américaine*," stated the opinionated parent. "*Non*, if I speak English, I speak the English correc', or none at all!"

"Dat is de old stuff—all the young Canadians dat is go-getters, dey is speak dat line of talk. She is more classy, *comme on dit*!"

Onesiphore, who could only understand stray words of this dialogue, opined at this point that speaking English was a meretricious accomplishment, unworthy of the attention of any French Canadian with a proper sense of pride.

"My friend," countered Polycarpe, heavily, "to be well educated, one should possess the power of expressing oneself with elegance, in a tongue that is not one's own. Patriotism has nothing to say in the matter."

Onesiphore responded with a scornful grunt. The others continued the conversation in the alien speech, and succeeded in displaying extraordinary fluency, if no great familiarity with the rules of syntax.

Eventually, the time for departure came and at

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the curt "*Allons*," of Onesiphore, they transferred the costumes and the contents of the cupboard to the tonneau of the car, then slipped away down the lane, through side streets, across the bridge again and into the country, each thrilling with the realization that they were now irrevocably embarked upon the adventurous enterprize. Polycarpe and Hercule expressed their sensations with loud jocularity (in English), and Onesiphore maintained a dour silence.

A short halt was made when clear of the city to enable the masqueraders to put on their robes; and then they were away again, Onesiphore driving like a veteran of the Grand Prix. The occupants of the back seat, their black cloaks and skirts spread so as to conceal the cases, carried on an unnecessarily high-pitched and very technical argument, as to the kind of motor car they would acquire with the proceeds of this and similar ventures, only pausing now and again for Hercule to call directions to Onesiphore.

That grim Jehu, inexpressibly irritated by the assaulting of his ears with the unintelligible gibberish, broke silence long enough to express the hope that his passengers would respect their calling long enough to pass the Customs Office at the border.

"It is not necessary," he observed, witheringly, "that the *douaniers* should entertain the suspicion that I am conveying a pair of insane *English!* Much better they should remark the modest and respectable behavior of holy French nuns!"

"Fear nothing, Onesiphore," hissed Begin *père*,

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loudly. "We will be quiet like mice. I smell success, my old one. I congratulate ourselves!"

Of a certainty, the heel of the bottle had removed the last trace of timidity from *Begin père et fils*.

In an incredibly short space of time the car drew to a standstill in the steel-blue glare of an arc light, while a sleepy Customs official slouched out of his office to inspect them. The ruse succeeded beyond their fondest hopes. It seemed as though he scarcely glanced at the dress of the two passengers before waving them permission to proceed. With a murmured "Good-night," he turned back to the office.

The exultant Onesiphore let in the clutch. The car shot forward a few yards—then, a deafening detonation split the stillness and halted the progress of the official back to his lurking-place.

The immediate thought of the three in the car was that their subterfuge had been discovered, and that the forces of the law had opened hostilities. Polycarpe recovered first, and realizing the true cause of the explosion, announced to the admiring night:

"By damn! Dis is one hell of a place to 'ave the blow-out!"

Onesiphore choked back a dry howl of rage, and in the instant's silence that ensued, the three heads of the conspirators rotated with the precision of automatic machinery, and three pairs of eyes regarded the official. One thought was in each brain. . . . Had he heard?

They were not long in doubt. A companion had

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run out at the noise, and now both officers stared oafishly at the disabled conveyance and its two innocent-looking passengers.

"Bill," the first man remarked, "that ain't no way for no nuns to talk!"

Grimly, the Customs men, revolvers prominent, advanced upon the car. "What in hell will you bootleggers think up next?"

Too late, Polycarpe remembered his character. Hiding his face in his hands, he began to recite a litany in a strained falsetto. Onesiphore had got out of the car, and hands in pockets, awaited events, seemingly an uninterested spectator. A faint grinding of teeth was the only sign of the stress of his emotions.

Polycarpe's devotions were rudely interrupted. A horny fist seized his collar through the stuff of his gown.

"Snap out of it, now," was the brief command.

Polycarpe, clinging to the hope that no one would maltreat a Holy Sister (he had never met a Customs Officer!) continued to pray, somewhat more devoutly. There was a sudden lift, a jerk, and he felt himself flying through the air. Then the earth smote him grievously, shaking every bone in his body and leaving him breathless.

When he opened his eyes, it was to perceive a grim and towering figure by his side. The figure bent down and two piercing eyes glared into his. Onesiphore!

He sat up, groaned, and felt tenderly the region which had borne the brunt of his fall. He did not

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dare to look at his partner in misfortune. But Onesiphore was not to be ignored. A huge hand was planted over Polycarpe's nose and mouth, a violent push sent him sprawling again; and as he waved arms and legs like a turtle that has been set upon its back, he heard a shrill, hysterical cackle.

“Oh, thou . . . thou . . . *Sacré Wabache!*”



IT HAD BEEN A LOVELY FIRE

CHAPTER XI: FIRE

THE parish never found out how Onesiphore happened to lose his automobile, though every avenue of information was explored by industrious nosers. Onesiphore said he had taken it to Montreal and sold it; Polycarpe explained the frantic call for funds which he had been obliged to make to pay the fines, by saying he had been offered a remarkable investment—a chance which had to be accepted instantly. Both men showed an hitherto unsuspected capacity for keeping their own counsel. One thing was certain, that they were again on bad terms. They spoke to each other—there was no open incivility—but the looks that were bestowed with the brief greetings they exchanged were more eloquent than many, many words. A deep mystery, and one eventually relegated to the category of the insoluble!

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For lack of fuel, interest in these events had pretty well faded when the fire at the residence of Jos. Rosario Camache occurred, and finally usurped the attention of the gossips. Jos. Rosario was the cobbler and harness-maker, and lived in a comfortable house towards the end of the village farthest from the church. His recent marriage had excited some comment, as he had reached the age of thirty before taking the nuptial plunge and this was evidence of some psychic or constitutional peculiarity. The French Canadian habitant marries young, and in a whole-hearted manner.

It was Euphorbe Gagnon who gave the alarm. Returning from a closely-contested quoits match, which had been finished by the aid of lanterns, he observed a reddish glow in the kitchen of the Camache house. The light flickered in a strange and ominous manner. He paused, and after some inner debate—for he did not wish to surprise the young couple in some connubial intimacy—entered the garden and peered into the kitchen window. His fears were confirmed . . . it was undoubtedly a fire. A portion of the floor and the wall near the back door were being rapidly licked up by the flames.

"AU FEU! AU FEU! UN INCENDIE!!" he roared lustily, and running round to the front door began to hammer on it with both fists, continuing his shouts. Euphorbe had a fine robust voice and soon windows popped open and excited voices inquired where the fire was. No sound came from the Camache household. Euphorbe paused and then decided to hurl

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some gravel at the window of the bedroom. Unfortunately, there was no gravel immediately available, so selecting two or three stones, slightly smaller than his fists, Euphorbe took aim and flung them in rapid succession. He missed the first two shots—though the resounding thump they made against the wall of the house must have apprized Jos. Rosario that something was afoot—but at the third and fourth attempt he scored bulls. A bellow of rage from the interior was heard, and a wild, touzle-headed, night-shirted figure bounded from the front door, brandishing fists, and demanding to know who was the miscreant that saw fit to play such idiotic tricks.

“Be calm, Joseph,” shouted Euphorbe, who by now was a little hoarse, “your house is on fire . . . in the kitchen!”

Jos. Rosario paused, agape, saw a number of men running towards his home, turned, and sped inside again. A glance into the kitchen told him the true state of affairs. With a howl of desperation, he turned and sprang up the stairs to acquaint his mate with the news. Madame had remained in bed, protecting herself against an onslaught of robbers by disappearing under the bedclothes. He commanded her to flee at once . . . she protesting that she would die of mortification to appear in public in her night-gown, which, although the most elegant in the mail-order catalogue, had been intended for his eyes alone. Jos., who had donned his trousers, replied by giving her a vigorous shove down the stairs and telling her he would throw her garments out of the window. The

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smoke and the flames which were now beginning to lick through the kitchen into the front part of the house, soon made her see the sense of his suggestion, and she fled screeching, into the yard.

Here seven or eight men had assembled: and seven or eight voices made themselves heard, giving directions. It was obvious that something must be done at once.

"Water, quickly! Where is the well?"

"Camache has none. The nearest is at Médéric Lafortune's!"

"No, it isn't! Larivière's is next door. It is excellent water!"

"Buckets—everyone run home and fetch buckets!"

"The first thing to do is to save the furniture. Everything must be turned out of doors!"

"Some man lend his coat to Madame Camache. She will catch cold!"

"Above all, the fire must not spread! The village will be endangered!"

"Send for Hilaire Letellier, and the *curé*!"

"The bell of the church must be rung . . . it is a job for all the men in the village!"

A crashing of glass arrested this hurly-burly, and the torso of Jos. Rosario appeared in the window above.

"Can you do nothing, imbeciles?" he yelled. "Someone come and help me get out this furniture! Look out, below!"

A scattering followed, as two chairs came flying through the air and splintered on the hard ground.

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Euphorbe Gagnon gallantly dashed into the house from which smoke was now pouring, and groped his way to the stairs. He looked up just in time to dodge a chest of drawers that Rosario, with herculean efforts had managed to push down. It upended and the drawers came out, scattering clothes, trinkets and linen all over the floor of the living room. Shouting to Rosario to be of a good courage for assistance was at hand, Euphorbe leapt to the stairs again, and was half way up when a mattress flung by the frenzied owner, hit him on the head and sent him crashing down.

"Pardon, Euphorbe, I did not see you . . . so quickly the smoke blinds one!"

Euphorbe, muttering, picked himself up and once more began the ascent, which this time he achieved.

The crowd was growing rapidly. Almost three fourths of the male population of the village was now present. Buckets, pitchers and other utensils capable of holding water appeared somehow, and a rending sound announced that the fence between the Camache and Larivière properties was being demolished so that a bucket-chain could pass the water from the well to the fire. A salvage gang had been organized, and men rushed into the house, shouting bravely, and emerged, minutes later, with a vase, a chair, or a picture. Meanwhile, objects rained down from above, energetically propelled by Euphorbe and the householder.

The cobbler's shop was entirely shut off from the rest of the house, and the door was locked. Notwith-

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standing its probable security, Alphonse Thibadeau seized an axe and smashed in the window, entered and began to throw boots and shoes into the crowd. They flew in all directions; three or four urchins helping on the work by relaying those which fell near the building and might have been imperilled by fire. The courage and energy of Alphonse called forth admiring comments, except from Hilaire Letellier, who, seeking more helpers for the bucket-chain, had been hit in the mouth by a boot.

Wilbrod Cabochin, who had returned to the parish some weeks back, occupied himself in preserving Madame Camache from the effects of chill. This he did by spreading his coat over her shoulders and placing his arm tightly round her waist. He was extremely concerned about the scantiness of her clothing, upon which he continually remarked in an agitated whisper in the lady's ear. Instinctive knowledge of First Aid principles warned him that a constant chafing of her anatomy was necessary in order to stimulate circulation. . . . Eventually, she caught sight of her best dress which had been thrown to the ground by her indefatigable spouse, and hastened to put it on, eagerly assisted by the young man. Wilbrod had never enjoyed a fire so much. His enjoyment continued until Jos. Rosario reached terra firma, when he decided that it might be better to abandon his protective attitude.

Meanwhile the *curé*, with an acolyte, arrived. At his approach, all stood respectfully inactive with bared heads. A group of choristers drawn from the

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crowd, followed him in an improvised procession as he moved round the house, sprinkling holy water and pronouncing the Latin appropriate to the occasion.

Heartened by the assurance of celestial intervention, the fire-fighters redoubled their efforts. . . . The bucket chain now began operations, and with shouts of encouragement, the receptacles passed from hand to hand. Water splashed and jerked in the air at each change of momentum, and for the most part found resting places on the trousers of the workers or on the ground. Thus, the vessels were never more than half full by the time they reached the hands of Hilaire Letellier, to whom was confided the post of honor and the responsibility of flinging the water on the fire. He had been a fireman for six months in Sherbrooke, and understood these matters.

Euphorbe and Jos. Rosario, who were completing their labors on the upper floor, found to their dismay that they were cut off. The flames had enveloped the stairway. (The furnishings of the ground floor had long ago been cleaned out.) They announced their predicament from the front window and urgently demanded succor.

Twenty voices told twenty other people where a ladder might be obtained, and eleven men ran off in the darkness. Meanwhile, the heat and smoke at the top of the house became unbearable and Rosario called for a blanket, announcing he was about to jump.

Willing hands sought the necessary article, but

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only a sheet was forthcoming. That was spread out and gripped tightly, waist high.

"Jump then, Joseph! All is ready!" they encouraged, and Rosario, half blinded, made a magnificent and thrilling leap. A rip and a thud followed simultaneously, and he lay groaning on the ground, entangled in the ruins of the sheet.

His wife precipitated herself upon him, screaming that he had been killed, but her anxiety was causeless, for he began a spirited denunciation of those who had chosen such flimsy material to save him from the effects of the jump. Euphorbe Gagnon, perceiving what had happened, lowered himself gingerly, hung by his hands from the sill, and, animated by a flame that flickered round his feet, let go.

The operations of the bucket-chain had met with scant success. The fire roared louder and louder, and it was obvious that nothing could be done to save the building. Soon, Hilaire Letellier stood back, wiping the sweat from his eyes and declared that they wasted their effort—"they might as well spit in hell and expect to put out its *maudit* fire!"

Exhausted by labor and their emotions, the workers and spectators accepted this verdict and stood back, watching with fascinated eyes the flames shoot higher and higher against the blackened shell. Gaps showed between the sheeting boards, giving glimpses of the white heat within the house. The boards split, curled, and dropped off, leaving only studding and joists. Before long, these too collapsed. The rear end of the house caved in, sending towers of

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sparks skyward. The side walls fell, followed by the front wall . . . and now nothing was left but a pile of *débris*, blazing fitfully. Men walked round the outskirts of the conflagration, beating out the embers that had been flung from the main mass.

It was all over and the crowd began to disperse. In an hour, no one was left except the Camaches, Hilaire Letellier, Télémache Bedaud, and the immediate neighbors. Eventually, those too, departed from the glowing ruins, the cobbler and his wife to take refuge with Télémache.

Fortunately, no doubt due to the efforts of the *curé*, there had been no wind, and no other dwellings had been threatened. On the morrow, Camache could move into an empty house at the other end of the village. . . .

It had been a lovely fire!



TRUE, THE SHEEP DIFFERS FROM THE ASS

CHAPTER XII: OVICULTURE

EARLY in June, Onesiphore made one of his rare appearances at the Mass. When it was over, he proceeded to the post-office in the store of Télémache Bedaud, as was customary. It was apparent to those who knew him best that his reflections were not wholly confined to matters spiritual. The old serpent had something on his mind—some devilment to practise, or some low trick to play. He would doubtless pick upon an unfortunate young fellow and bulldoze and browbeat him in what he was pleased to call “improving debate.”

A general uneasiness prevailed among the *assistance*, for while the spectacle of Onesiphore in action was counted prime entertainment, there was a very natural disquietude until the victim had been selected—a state of affairs that recalled Druidical festivals

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where human sacrifices were chosen from the audience, and where, doubtless, no one was much at ease until the cast for the ceremony had been drawn.

However, on this occasion, Onesiphore merely had some news to impart. A few glittering generalities thundered on the air, gained him the attention of the audience. Then he proceeded to develop his discourse by allusions to his commercial acumen, his previous successes in money-making enterprizes of a novel nature, the originality and fertility of his mental powers, and at length when his auditors had pretty well made up their minds that Onesiphore had found a gold mine, or was at least contemplating establishing a bank, he concluded:

“So, my good friends, those of you who know me best, who perhaps have wondered why I continue to waste myself in this country parish, why, for example, I have not chosen a career in the politics or the high finance, you may also have suspected that Monsieur Pouget is, after all, no fool; that he can tell maple syrup from pea soup . . . *hein?* . . . *Enfin* . . . to make an end to your impatience, I confide to you that the combination I have in hand is nothing less than to set up in the business of sheep ranching!”

The speaker broke off and waited for comment, glancing rapidly around the company where, on every face was evident the mental struggle necessary to bring his high-sounding and mesmeric eloquence into congruity with the homely notion of oviculture as practised thereabouts. Meanwhile,

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Onesiphore absent-mindedly pulled off a leaf from the bunch of *tabac naturel* hanging over his head, crumbled it between his hands and proceeded to load his pipe.

Médéric Lafortune was the first to recover from the general stupefaction and was so indiscreet as to loose on the long silence a derisive chuckle. Onesiphore stiffened and directed a withering glance at Médéric. But controlling his emotion, he finished the lighting of his pipe, while the crowd, aware that entertainment of a high order was impending, edged unobtrusively back until they made a kind of ring with Onesiphore, leaning against the counter and Médéric, trying to appear at ease on a biscuit box, in the centre.

"You seem," observed Onesiphore, when he had blown a huge cloud of smoke from his bubbling old briar, "you seem to regard this little project of mine as a species of farce, *hein?*"

"*Pas du tout*, Onesiphore," hastily disclaimed Médéric. "But . . ."

"But what, then? The ideas of a personage of the known wisdom of M. Lafortune must always intrigue—nay, instruct—those of us who are of a more feeble *esprit*."

"But why . . . sheep? . . . '*Coute donc!* There are lots of sheep at the moment . . . perhaps not in the parish . . . but I recollect many, or maybe I should say *several*, who have had sheep, and did not become millionaires."

"Indeed? Well! I thought as much. . . . Because

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certain imbeciles have had a few scrawny muttons which proved themselves an expense instead of an income, you imagine that I too, will follow in their so stupid footsteps, equally uninformed as to the disposition of the animal to be bred? In short, you laugh in my face, and as good as tell me that I too, am a fool. . . . Very well, M. Lafortune!"

"But Onesiphore, indeed, no! I had no intention. . . . Of course, as you say . . . you will manage better. . . . Nevertheless, I have heard the price of wool is not high. . . ."

"Before you take it upon yourself, M. Lafortune, to advise me, it would perhaps be better if you would endeavor to comprehend what it is that I have in mind."

Médéric achieved an apologetic cough, and Onesiphore continued:

"Let me inform you that the sheep raising you have known, has about the same relation to the operations *I* shall undertake, as the selling of a pint of coal-oil by my friend, Bedaud here, has in relation to the enterprizes of M. Rockefeller! But perhaps you are not aware of the existence of M. Rockefeller?"

Médéric admitted that he had heard of the oil magnate.

"Ah," commented Onesiphore, raising his eyebrows, "perhaps also, your studies have made you acquainted with the fact that there is a country called Australia?"

Médéric had heard of Australia, too.

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"But what you doubtless do not know is, that Australia makes immense fortunes from wool and mutton—that its exportations in these articles supply the world?"

For all Médéric knew to the contrary, such was the case.

"Well," argued Onesiphore, belligerently, "if in Australia, why not, M. Lafortune, in Canada? We are both Dominions of the British Empire. . . . I suppose you will grant that?"

Médéric granted it.

"We are both governed by the autonomy . . . which is to say, the Premier?"

"I cannot deny it," murmured Médéric, meekly.

"May I ask you then, again, why—seeing you have admitted that we are the equals of the Australians in all respects—we, too, should not make fortunes by the raising of sheep right here in the parish of Saint-Epistemon de Dudswell, where nature has been unprecedently prodigal of her benefits? That is, provided, of course, the venture is undertaken with a degree of understanding above that of the animals, themselves?"

Médéric objected that the climate was different.

"But certainly, the climate is different," shouted Onesiphore, "and there is the greatest advantage, making the success of the scheme assured. What, my dear M. Lafortune, do sheep carry on their backs?"

"For my part," said Médéric, simply, "I have

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never observed them to carry anything on their backs. The sheep is not used as a beast of burden."

"To speak plainly, you are a perfect agronomist, my dear M. Lafortune," rejoined Onesiphore. "True, the sheep differs from the ass . . . differs from it perhaps to a greater extent than. . . . But to my argument! The sheep is provided with a thick coat of wool. To make the matter quite clear, wool is a protection against the cold. Therefore, the sheep was intended for a cold climate and will thrive best in that environment. Do you follow me?"

Médéric was willing to admit that the argument was sound.

"You seem to have some doubts. But let me ask, do you wear an overcoat in summer? No! Yet that is what those Australians ask the sheep to do!" Onesiphore looked round as if to invite those present to take note of this thoughtless practice on the part of the Antipodeans. No comment being offered, he went on:

"I think I have convinced you that if a person of enterprize and sound understanding sets about the business of raising sheep in this province, and particularly in this parish, unlimited wealth will be his! Just look at these. . . ."

He pulled from his pocket two grimy half-tones which pictured an ocean of sheep swirling round an artesian well, and a bungalow residence which was said to belong to the owner of the sheep. A very charming residence, almost palatial. The pictures

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were passed respectfully from hand to hand, eventually returning to their owner.

The prospective sheep-king eyed Médéric for some time, seeming to debate whether he had sufficiently vindicated himself or whether he should mete out further punishment. At length he decided to be clement and buttoning up his coat took leave of the assemblage. The effect of his dignified exit was marred to some degree by the clamor that rose before the door had quite closed after him—a clamor interspersed with what he suspected to be scoffing laughter. Onesiphore hesitated, but with a shrug, he dismissed the notion of returning and passed on.

He had been closely followed from the store by Polycarpe Begin, who begged the favor of a lift home. Onesiphore consented none too graciously, and for five minutes or so, there was not a word spoken. Then Polycarpe launched out into a tirade of abuse against Médéric Lafortune. What animus the speaker had did not appear, nor was there richness or variety in his calumny—which consisted in repeating a few scandalous epithets with such emotion that they became quite effective. At length, a thawing effect becoming perceptible in Onesiphore, Polycarpe changed the subject, and observed:

“Now, Onesiphore, consider the good neighbors we have been for these many years . . . barring a few paltry disagreements, which are only to be expected between two *csprits forts*—a dull world it would be if a man thought always like his neighbor—and so, it

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occurs to me, that in view of the amity and respect in which we hold each other, it would be a thing most excellent to enter into a closer bond—a business partnership, in fine.”

He paused and looked sideways at Onesiphore, who kept his eyes fixed on the horse’s crupper. Polycarpe persevered.

“In the enterprize you have in mind, you will need aid. Will you engage then the shepherds . . . expend your good money . . . when you can, by accepting my services, save those funds and invest them in still more sheep? Also, you will need an extent of *terrain* greater than you have at your disposal. Well, *regarde!* My farm adjoins yours and can provide the needed range for your vast flocks; the fences between the Pouget and Begin properties can be demolished.”

Onesiphore spat and continued to be silent.

“Also, above all these things, which will be of great benefit to you in your undertaking, I can perhaps, provide additional capital . . . to a modest extent. Reflect, Onesiphore, that the want of capital has spoiled many a promising *affaire!*”

“I am not in need of money,” was the astounding response. “To be frank with you, Polycarpe, for the present I wish to develop my business free from the difficulties a partnership would impose.”

“But consider, Onesiphore, all the advantages I have offered! We are friends—old friends! Is it likely we should have any serious differences? I would in general defer to your superior knowledge of the

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industry . . . but you must remember, *mon vieux*, that two heads are better than one!"

"If one of those heads is a cabbage, the proverb is not true," snarled Onesiphore.

Polycarpe bounced on his seat and was about to make a retort to this gratuitous insult, but mastered his rage and after a pause went on in a shaken, though still persuasive tone:

"You must have your joke, Onesiphore? I know you of old. Ha, ha! But continue to think of the partnership. I will name once more those things which you will have to gain . . . my assistance in handling the beasts, my grass for their nourishment, and my money if you need it! Sleep on the matter, Onesiphore, and let me know, tomorrow. Ideas, that startle one when new, often prove to be inspired upon further reflection."

"It does not require hours of ponderment for me to be able to detect an imbecility," replied Onesiphore. "And I say to you, Polycarpe Begin, that you had better get the idea out of your head, right away. Understand, *tout de suite*, you are not going to attach yourself to me and share in the wealth I shall create by the superiority of my intellect and the enterprize of my nature. That is mine! And I do not care to be so philanthropic as to make a free gift of it to others!"

"You will regret this decision," said Polycarpe, in a choked voice as he saw his dream of becoming one of the sheep barons of Dudswell Township dissolve. "Remember, there is nothing to prevent me

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from setting up in the sheep business, myself, and a partner would be better for you than a competitor.”

“Of that, permit me to be the judge. I prefer a stupid rival to an assistant lacking in intelligence. . . . *C'est ça!* Here is your farm . . . I wish you good day!”

Polycarpe climbed out in silence and stalked away, his heart filled with bitterness. He turned when he reached the verandah and stared after the vanishing equipage of M. Pouget. Under an uncontrollable impulse, he shook his fist at his neighbor's back, and spluttered:

“Old pig . . . Dirty dog of a greedy monster! . . . Miser! . . . Pig of a pig! . . . You will regret this! . . . Baptism!”



DID SEE SOMETHING LIKE A SHEEP

CHAPTER XIII: SHEEP-DOG

THE passage of time did not efface the resentment that Polycarpe felt at Onesiphore's discourteous rejection of his proposed partnership. In fact, he brooded over the matter whenever he was not occupied with any strenuous labor, and as it happened to be a slack season of the farmer's activities he had plenty of time for mental operations.

One day, about a week after the epochal Sunday, when he was hanging over his gate and staring stonily at a puddle in the road, Evariste Maboule drove up from the direction of the Pouget farm.

"Bonjour, mon vieux. Ça va?"

Polycarpe grunted noncommittally, and turned a sour eye on Evariste, but the latter, ignoring his friend's obvious disinclination to talk, continued:

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"The old Onesiphore with his sheep . . he makes progress, *hein?*"

"Perhaps. I take no interest in the affair."

"But all the village talks of nothing else! To tell you the truth, I drove out this way on purpose to see what the old one was doing. Several have done so, but they have found out nothing. You understand however, that most of the people of the parish seem to have a ridiculous fear of that old reptile. Me, I do not care for him, at all!"

Polycarpe gloomily averred that he was equally indifferent to anything M. Pouget might see fit to say or do.

"At the same time," mused M. Maboule, "there must be something behind all his *fanfaronnade*, for I give you my word, he has put up a great sign painted in black, with letters as long as my foot . . . 'O. Pouget. Eleveur de Moutons.' We must allow that for once, his many words may mean something."

This intelligence impressed Polycarpe in spite of his determination to let no hint of his interest encourage Evariste.

He queried: "And what else did you observe?"

"*Maudit!* Nothing out of the ordinary. The farm seems the same as ever it was. I saw no sheep. *Sans doute*, they were over the hill in the back pasture."

"You did not drive in and ask Onesiphore to see his sheep?" asked Polycarpe, not without malice.

"Well . . . I *did* see Onesiphore. . . . He came out. . . . He began to talk in the fashion he has, you know. . . . He seemed to think I was there to steal

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the whitewash off the house. *Enfin*, I departed. In the face of his injuries, I found it hard to keep my temper, and I should not like to forget myself with an old man, as he is. . . .”

“No, of course not,” commented Polycarpe, grinning at the flush that showed through the stubble on Evariste’s face.

“But what I stopped for chiefly, was to find out whether *you* have ever seen those so-marvelous sheep? Surely you, a neighbor, must have had many opportunities?”

“Me? I give not *that* for Onesiphore and his sacred sheep,” said Polycarpe, snapping his fingers. “If Onesiphore Pouget had seven thousand sheep and each one of them had four heads and thirteen tails I would not budge to see them!”

Evariste searched beneath his hat for an irritated area.

“So you have never seen them? None of them, at all?”

“Well,” admitted Polycarpe, “one day, as I happened to be back of the hill and near the line fence, I chanced to glance over in that direction by accident, so to speak, and it seemed to me that I *did* see something like a sheep—or two—but I give you my word that I have paid no attention to that old fool or his sheep, whatever. They were miserable, dirty-looking beasts, anyway!”

“*Tiens!* There is something strange in this!”

Evariste leaned out of the buggy, precariously balanced, and lowered his voice.

SHEEP-DOG

"Where, do you think, Onesiphore got all these sheep?"

Polycarpe stared blankly at his interlocutor. This question had never occurred to him.

"Attend, then! But first, promise that you will not repeat this information."

Polycarpe took the oath of secrecy, and Evariste continued:

"M. Pichot, who lives close to Saint-Ignace de Tring—you know him? *Bien!* Ten days ago, he was conducting a large flock of sheep to Harrierville to entrain them. At a cross-road, a cursed automobile comes into the middle of the flock and Pichot and his boys lose control. They run over the whole countryside. Pichot says he lost nearly a quarter of his number. . . ."

Evariste paused while Polycarpe stared, speechless.

"It is said that Onesiphore went over to Harrierville one day, not so long ago. . . . *Enfin*, I leave you to draw your own conclusions. *I may say, I have drawn mine!*"

Polycarpe stood revolving this piece of astounding intelligence, when a heavenly inspiration descended upon him. His eyes gleamed and he gave vent to several oaths in tribute to his own cunning. He grinned and nodded and holding his hand alongside his mouth, as though to prevent Onesiphore from hearing, whispered:

"What . . . suppose M. Pichot were to receive a letter one day . . . to tell him that Onesiphore Pou-

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get has acquired a large number of sheep? That would be a piece of news for him, eh?"

He drew back, and the gossips admired each other for a full minute.

"You will do that? You fully intend to do that?"

"My friend, when Polycarpe Begin says he will do a thing, that thing is done!"

After this magnificent climax, there did not seem to be anything more to add and Evariste was just about to gather up his reins when he noticed a large dog rooting aimlessly around in the pile of tin cans, straw, and other rubbish at the side of the barn.

"You have a new dog there, I see," he remarked. "By damn, he is no beauty!"

It was obvious that speculation as to its ancestry must be hazardous, but after some consideration Evariste satisfied himself that a collie and a fox-hound were recent links in the genealogical chain. The former's pointed nose and slanting eyes, the latter's large, flapping ears, dewlap and a very hound-like tail could be identified, while the general body formation was a compromise between the two types, as was the patchy coat, approximating sleekness in parts, with woolly excrescences in others. Truly, a strange quadruped!

Polycarpe, while he knew in his heart that here was no canine aristocrat, resented Evariste's disparagement of even the least of his possessions.

"There are other qualities to be considered in a dog beside looks; and much more important ones," he countered, heavily.

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"Oh, yes, I do not deny that. Quite possibly. But, where did you buy him?"

"I did not buy him at all. He came of his own free will. One day he arrived. He took a fancy to me. There is something about me—I say it without the wish to boast—that is attractive to animals. They have a natural confidence in me. I have heard that this is evidence of nobility in a man . . . but I do not place much importance in the matter."

"Oh, but such is a well-known fact," replied Evariste, politely. "You were speaking of the brute's good qualities, however. What are they, for example?"

"Well . . . he has a vast intelligence. One has only to observe his expression to become convinced of that."

Evariste looked, but the dog's expression was not ascertainable at that moment as he was engaged in prospecting a hole under the barn and so was taken in reverse by the visitor's inquiring glance.

"*Aussi*, he is faithful and of a kind disposition. Courageous also! What more could one expect in a single dog?"

"What indeed? As you say, a noble animal."

"None can deny it."

"Have you named him?"

"Oh, I call him King."

"King? As by honor to *M. le Premier Ministre*, yes?"

"Precisely."

"And is M. King flattered by that?"

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"Why not? Have some regard for reason. In honoring the dog, I do not degrade the man, do I?"

"Why, not exactly, so to speak, but it seems to show a lack of respect."

"Nonsense! We call our horses Napoleon quite often! No one has said that shows a lack of respect to *le Grand Empereur!*"

"Well, I will not argue with you, but I doubt if M. King will like it."

"Let him come then and tell me so," cried Polycarpe. "For my part, as between the politicians, I think it would please him. *Icitte, King!*"

King, who had finished his investigations and was sitting in front of the rubbish pile, contemplated them with a friendly interest but made no move.

"I should not be surprised," continued Polycarpe, galvanized by a new idea, "if that old Pouget needs a dog to help in the herding of his sheep. And he has none. He would have to look long before he found an animal of the intelligence and activities of King, there."

"You would sell him?"

"At a good big price, perhaps. But M. Pouget will not require a sheep dog for very long if the combination we have planned should have its effect, *hein?*"

"No. But it would be most amusing if he bought the dog, paying for him through the nose, and then had to restore the sheep to their proper owner. Would not that make a humorous situation, my friend?"

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“Undeniably.”

The pair delivered themselves to soundless laughter.

“We shall see how matters turn out. . . . Only at a fair price, you understand. . . . I do not go out of my way for M. Pouget. . . . *Non!* Although he has done me injuries, I am above spite.”

King, perceiving that their interest in him had waned, proceeded to disinter a bone but he made upon it no hungry onslaught—a circumstance that Evariste remarked.

“Yes,” agreed Polycarpe. “I told you he possesses a strange disposition, that dog. Although he had the appetite of a hippopotamus when first he came, for the last two days he has hardly touched a thing. The boiled potatoes we give him, he will not look at. Even a bit of bacon-rind he merely sniffed. . . . I cannot understand. . . . I hope he will not become sick. . . . I have formed an affection for him.”

“He appears to be in good health and what is more, to be well fed. There can be nothing to worry about.”

King seemed to know he had once more claimed the spotlight. He wore a bashful air and scratched his ear, dubiously.

“*Icitte*, King. . . . *Viens 'cite*. . . . KING!”

King finished his scratching and yawned but held royally aloof. Polycarpe became annoyed—a disobedient dog cannot appreciate nobility in man.

“KING! come when I tell you! It is your master calling you!”

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Evariste snickered and added fuel to Polycarpe's wrath.

"King! Good dog! King! King! KING! KING! ICITTE!!! Idiot, come here! . . . Come here, or I'll teach you to come when I call!"

King's expression changed from a simple benignity to a great wariness as Polycarpe's tone became more threatening, and when his irate proprietor stooped suddenly, he scrambled to his feet, placed his tail between his legs and executed a rapid movement to the rear of the house—smoothly, unostentatiously, but with an admirable speed and nice timing; for the rock, propelled with all Polycarpe's energy, missed him by only six inches as he rounded the corner.

"Indeed, he *is* intelligent . . . and discreet!" observed Evariste. "*Marche donc, Joséphine. . .*"

Polycarpe thought of an excellent retort to this jibe, but only after his visitor had departed. He stared at the retreating buggy, now nearly half a mile away, then turned and looked down the road in the other direction, to observe Onesiphore advancing with vast and determined strides. Even at a hundred yards' distance, it was obvious that he was greatly agitated. Polycarpe considered his malevolent and piercing glare, the bristling of his whiskers, the fixity of his habitual rictus and observing all these symptoms, knew that the old fellow was greatly angered—in fact, was at the peak of one of his inordinate rages.

He felt that it would be prudent to withdraw. True, he had committed no wrong against Ones-

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iphore. . . . But, well . . . reason and right did not enter into any dispute with that old reptile. So, with a careless air, a pretence at ignoring the hostile approach, he sauntered up towards his house. A raucous shout arrested him.

"*Pardon*, M. Begin, but if you would be so good as to spare me a minute of your valuable time. . . . I have a little affair to discuss with you."

Polycarpe turned and surveyed Onesiphore who had by this time reached the gate. He felt somehow, that he would be well advised to avoid this interview but his manhood required that he make a show of indifference and self-confidence.

"I have no stomach for discussion with you, M. Pouget. If you have come to ask me to be your partner in any get-rich-quick scheme, you will waste your time. . . . I will have nothing to do with you. . . . Kindly do not encroach upon my premises." . . . This last sharply as Onesiphore fumbled with the latch on the gate.

"Ho . . . is that what you say? What an imbecile. . . . Very well, we can have our talk as we now stand. But you will pay attention to me, for there is a grave matter which requires your distinguished consideration."

"I am a busy man, M. Pouget," returned Polycarpe, coldly. "Say what you have to say, and go! I do not care to stay here chattering."

Polycarpe remained where he had halted, some thirty feet from Onesiphore and on the slope of the knoll on which the house was built. This command-

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ing position would, he felt, give him an advantage.

"To come to the point, then," was Onesiphore's staggering announcement, "I would be obliged if you would at once pay to me two hundred dollars!"

Polycarpe gaped and goggled for a moment. This extraordinary demand quite took his breath away. However, he recovered himself and replied:

"But you are too moderate in your request, my dear M. Pouget. Why not a thousand . . . or five thousand. . . ? It is all the same to me!"

"Bah! I suppose you will attempt to deny that your devil of a dog has killed three-quarters of my flock of sheep?"

Polycarpe saw Onesiphore rise and sway before him like a huge balloon.

"*What?* Impossible! *How* many sheep?"

Onesiphore hesitated and gulped. "It is as I have said. The damage is to the amount of two hundred dollars . . . very moderate. . . ."

Polycarpe was bewildered by the news of the dramatically-announced ovine holocaust, but he perceived one thing clearly enough.

"You are mistaken in thinking I have a dog. I have no dog."

"Oho. . . . Undoubtedly you speak the truth! It must then have been an elephant or a camel which I have heard barking in your yard, and have observed scratching his fleas, gnawing bones, and sneaking about!"

"Oh, as for that . . . well, a dog *has* been hang-

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ing round here. He came of his own free will. He took a fancy to me. There is something about me—I say it without the wish to boast—that is attractive to animals. They have a natural confidence in me. I heard that this is evidence of nobility in a man—but I don't place much importance in the matter. I cannot drive it away. Why, just a few minutes ago I threw stones at it until my arm ached. . . . You may ask Evariste Maboule."

"Hear what I have to say," thundered Onesiphore. "You cannot escape the consequences by such trickery. *You* are responsible for the acts of that dog!"

"By no means. It is a stray dog. It is not mine."

"That bloodthirsty brute! That murderer! I go to my pasture to give some salt to my charges, and there they lie—not one, nor two, but *three* of them . . . weltering in their innocent blood . . . their throats torn out and a quantity of their flesh devoured. . . . What have you to say to *that*?"

"*Three* sheep, did you tell me? But, I thought you mentioned that three-quarters of your flock were killed?" Polycarpe lost himself in mental arithmetic, staring strangely at Onesiphore who seemed about to choke. Eventually, by the aid of his fingers he completed his calculation, opened his mouth, pointed a derisive finger at his neighbor, and crowed:

"Ho! Hohoho! Hahaha! You had then only four sheep? Hahaha!!! Your enormous flock about which you spoke with such vast magnificence . . . four forlorn muttons! Hoho! Haha! . . ."

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Polycarpe doubled up with laughter but suddenly undoubled himself and made for the house. Onesiphore, gnashing his teeth and flailing the air with his long arms, had opened the gate and advanced. But Polycarpe bounded away and slammed the door in his face.

In a moment, the bereaved shepherd recovered his breath and began an oration, earnestly entreating Polycarpe to come out and renew the conference, ornamenting his chief request with the grossest insults he had at his command, and threats of legal, physical, and moral reprisals for the loss he had suffered.

Suddenly, a sound from the back of the house clipped his speech in the middle of a sentence—an unmistakable yelp, followed by a volley of profanity from Polycarpe . . . a few seconds' pause, and the deafening report of a shot-gun . . . renewed yelps, rapidly diminishing in volume. Onesiphore ran round the corner just in time to see King, a comet-like brown streak, cross a distant stumpy pasture and disappear in a patch of woods. The dog attained an incredible velocity, though he seemed to be running on only three legs.

A cough from the direction of the verandah recalled Onesiphore from the contemplation of this spectacle. He looked up and saw Polycarpe carelessly leaning against the jamb of the door, shot-gun in hand, its muzzle pointing directly at his neighbor's stomach. Their eyes clashed . . . Onesiphore's wavered and fell. He turned, and dejectedly walked to

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the gate, closed it and stumped back along the road, humiliated and filled with impotent rage.

When he had progressed about fifty yards, Polycarpe had his third inspiration of the day.

Cupping his gnarled hands on either side of lips whose grimness gave way to a smile of triumph, he bleated plaintively:

"Baaa-a-a- . . . Baaa-a-a!"

When Onesiphore turned, he saw only the gentle closing of the front door.



SHOCKED INTO ATTENTION BY NOVELTIES OF REASONING

CHAPTER XIV: GLOOM

THE weeks that followed the collapse of the sheep-raising enterprize were bitter ones for Onesiphore.

Zéphyrine and he were alone on the farm for Mathilde, whose resolve to become a nun had been of brief duration, was visiting a maternal aunt in Thetford Mines. This estimable lady had been blessed some nineteen times with pledges of marital affection (eleven of them still survived) and now looked forward to having her cup of joy filled to overflowing by a twentieth child. As none of the older children were girls, it was thought that Mathilde would be very useful during the period when her aunt's activities were curtailed, and Zéphyrine was glad to let her go. A change of scene would do the girl good. Residence in the bosom of a family so singularly

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avored in all that made for matrimonial felicity, would dispel the last traces of her crack-brained notion to enter a convent. Also, there was a surplus population of men in Thetford—working in the asbestos mines—and who knew but that Mathilde might ensnare one of them? Although the miners delved in unflammable material, there was no reason to believe that their hearts would be proof against the fires of love.

Zéphyrine now alternated between relief at her daughter's absence and a desire to have her at home. Onesiphore's sulking was exceedingly hard to bear, particularly in silence. If there had been anyone to hear the story of her martyrdom. . . .

Zéphyrine did not mind going to the village for supplies. This was almost an emancipation for her, for in the past she had been kept pretty well tied to her stove and spinning wheel. Onesiphore had even bought her shoes and triennial hats on his excursions to town.

But for Onesiphore, society had become intolerable. Conversation with the Saint-Epistemonois on any subject whatever, inevitably veered to the accursed topic of mutton. Recollection of his disaster and discomfiture paralyzed his will-to-argue; he simply could not dispute with, and overcome, those whom he had so often defeated in the past. He was a Napoleon whose star had set.

He became a recluse. He kept a silence that was terrifying, a presage of some impending volcanic outburst; his gloom was as unnatural as it was por-

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tentious. In the past he had, after his peculiar fashion, treated Mme. Pouget not unkindly. When there had been no one better to talk to, he would undertake to improve her mind, and although the excellent woman had schooled herself to become habituated to his ranting, she was often shocked into admiring attention by some novelties of reasoning and thunderous heresies.

She was in a way, proud to be his wife; if he was something of an Ishmaelite, avoided by the villagers, it was because (as he was never tired of explaining) they recognized that he was a man of a superior order to themselves and were resentful; they avoided him because he made them feel their inferiority.

Therefore, her early pleasure in the freedom which Onesiphore's depression permitted, soon gave way to apprehension. She felt that his health would certainly be affected by his mental attitude. He must be shaken out of it and induced to take an interest in life. Formerly, she had answered when spoken to—a practice that gave her as a rule, sufficient conversational exercise, notwithstanding her gift of volubility and her excellent talent for the obfuscation of the issues that arose. Now, she went farther than that. But, although she initiated a deliberate system of sabotage in her culinary efforts, Mme Pouget was unable to stir her husband (who had never been reluctant to voice his opinions on household management—opinions usually in the form of unfavorable criticism) to any protest other than leaving the spoiled food on his plate. Burnt potatoes, soggy pork and beans, super-

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peppered soup, tea flavored with coal-oil . . . all her efforts were vain.

She determined on another plan of campaign . . . a systematic attack on all his pet theories and the beliefs that served him best as texts for his heterodox sermons. She announced herself inflamed with the most militant spirit of Mother Church; she reproached him with his contumacy to the local *curé*; she asked for ridiculous sums by way of offering to make his peace with the keepers of the Gate of Heaven; she described with an imagination scarcely creditable to herself, the sufferings he was likely to endure in Hell unless he should repent; she ended by praying aloud that his hard heart might be softened and his stiff neck bowed.

Onesiphore was only drawn to the extent of one glowering look and two expectorations.

This flat failure greatly discouraged her. It was only half-heartedly that she attempted to raise his ire by praising the personal beauty and parts of Polycarpe Begin; by dwelling for nearly two hours on her spouse's folly in purchasing an automobile only to lose it in the height of the season; by reproaching him for his mismanagement of their daughter's marriage arrangements. Even a carefully prepared discourse on his departure from the strict standard of Belvederean beauty, the smallness of their family and the fifteen years difference in their ages, fell on apparently unhearing ears.

At last, she did obtain a reaction, a temporary recrudescence of the old Onesiphore. Indeed, he rose to

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record heights, owing doubtless to the long suppression of his natural passions. The monologue leading up to the incident, ran something as follows:

“ . . . forever spending your time in reading, so that you may the better argue with the good-for-nothings of the village instead of working, as a respectable man ought, and providing your wife and child with the comforts to which they are entitled. . . . Talk, talk, talk, . . . argue, argue, argue. Had I only known before I married you what a wind-bag I was tying myself to, I would have decided differently. . . . Never have I had the luxuries other men find means to shower on their wives—not a smell of them! No fine clothes, no sewing machine—the cream separator is old. . . . there is not one of the neighbors but has a better one. . . . Why? Why must I submit to these hardships? Because I was a fool—idiot enough to ally myself with a babbler, a loafer, who has not the capacity to make money, even if he had the ambition concealed within his great hulking body. . . . Boasting about the wealth he will one day have. . . . that is his strong point. . . . Ha ha ha!!! *Skgrmp!* . . . That business of the automobile, . . . And the sheep! Good Lord! The pity I have had to submit from the wives of sensible men! *Pfthfp!* It is something to try the temper! To be married to a fool that brags for weeks of a fortune he will make in mutton and wool, who raves of enormous flocks to everyone he can force to listen. . . . Bah! . . . Intelligence! Grand combinations!

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Sheep. . . . flocks of them. . . . And what turns out. . . .”

Mme Pouget never could be sure exactly of what happened at this point. The tirade had been produced almost automatically; she had given up hope of any real success and she had not even had her eyes on Onesiphore. There was an enormous shock, a temporary blindness, blackness following a flash of light. . . . Consciousness was suspended for a time, long or short it might have been, and when it returned she felt the effect of some violent blow that had descended upon her cranium. Raising her hand to the affected spot, something warm and sticky was discovered, some ghastly detritus. . . . Blood? Brains? No, it was gravy—and potatoes! Mme Pouget observed that the tureen which had contained the principal course of their evening meal had disappeared from its place on the table, and glancing down, saw shards of pottery and those portions of the stew that had not adhered to her person.

“Wash your face!” came the harsh command.

Mme Pouget did so, and thereafter abandoned her indirect attempts to improve her lord’s spirits. She trusted that she was a dutiful wife, and it pained her that her mate should remain in such unnatural acquiescence but . . . evidently, while the danger to the sufferer from this melancholia was problematical, the risk taken by anyone who should attempt to relieve him was very real. She would let him be.

It was not long before her anxiety was intensified

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by another symptom of Onesiphore's crumbling moral fibre. He resorted to the immemorial and treacherous consolation of bruised souls, the balm for world-battered spirits—the sweet septembral juice—in its local manifestation, *whiskey blanc*. It was not that his use of this palliative had any noticeably bad effects; but rather the non-existence of such effects, that so alarmed Zéphyrine. When Onesiphore had been normal, like every other honest man, he had on occasion inebriated himself with strong waters: had become, according to his mood, noisy, hyperargumentative, disciplinary, and—rarely—amorous. This was to be expected, and to be put up with, like the unavoidable ills of life, which lend ordinary existence their solace. But when he sat in his chair, and absorbed entirely unreasonable draughts which failed utterly to banish the cloud from his brow, *then* there was indeed something wrong! His drinking was doing him no good. Money was being expended moreover, to no purpose. So far as Zéphyrine could see, he would have had as much stimulation from the well behind the house.

She had heard somewhere, that when the whiskey does not take hold any more, the drinker is in a bad state. Following several weeks' observation of this unnaturalness, she became almost unstrung. She was desperate for some remedy, to know some course of action that could rescue her husband from the *descensus æterni* of alcoholism. Remonstrance, she felt, would be useless. She was frankly intimidated after the experience with the soup tureen—which had

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shown her that volcanic fires still rumbled beneath Onesiphore's apparent inertia.

She told, discreetly, her troubles to a few of the neighborhood wives and received commiseration and head-shakings, but no advice other than leaving her home, to avoid being murdered—cheerful counsel which could not be acted upon for many reasons. Where could she go? Where could she get money to go anywhere? Would not her departure, if discovered by Onesiphore, precipitate an outbreak? A recourse to the *curé* brought nothing better. The *curé* regretfully confessed that his influence with Onesiphore was a negative quantity. He feared that his interference would only make matters worse. In this judgment Zéphyrine was forced to concur; she received however, the shepherd's assurance that he would petition the Higher Powers on her behalf, for guidance and comfort, and even, (though he was frankly doubtful of the result), that Onesiphore might be made to see the error of his ways.

And it may have been due to his prayers that the distressed wife did receive aid, from a direction quite unforeseen.

One sunny morning, when she was in the large pasture gathering dandelions for the salad, she observed Polycarpe Begin leaning over the fence. She gave him good day, and continued her harvest in silence. She had never had much to say to the Begins since the unfortunate affair of the betrothal. Her resentment though less overt than her husband's was quite as powerful. Also, she had listened to Onesiphore

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pouring the vials of his contempt on the Polycarpian intellect for so long, that she had got into a way of regarding their neighbor as really incapable of appreciating any rational human thought—in short, one to whom it would be a waste of time to address any conversation. Polycarpe however was oblivious of this and desired speech with madame. To this end, he addressed a series of coughs rising in pitch and volume, to the ample rear elevation of Mme Pouget, and when these failed to attract her attention, (at least to the point of causing her to change her posture) he announced in a positive, yet kindly tone:

“Mme Pouget, if you could give me your attention a few moments. . . .”

The lady felt that she could hardly ignore this, so straightened up and turned around somewhat red in the face, and favored M. Begin with a curious stare.

“Is it true, what I have been told, my dear madame, that Onesiphore is not—is not well?” he continued.

“He is not so sick that he would relish inquiries prompted by malice, or. . . .”

“But madame! Please forget that in the past we two have had our differences. . . . It is to be regretted. . . . But everyone knows I am a good Christian. . . . We are instructed in our duty to our neighbors. . . . It is well-known in the parish that you are a woman on whom trouble presses heavily at this moment. . . . Be assured that you have my sympathy.”

“It is kind of you, M. Begin. . . . Onesiphore is

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not what properly might be called sick. . . . He still has his strength," concluded Zéphyrine, a little more graciously.

"Yes . . . but . . . his temper, shall we say . . . his disposition is not quite what it was. . . . That is so?"

"Possibly. . . . It is not his habit to sit silent for a long time."

"In fact, madame . . . please do not be offended. . . . Onesiphore has, as one might say. . . ." Here Polycarpe, finding no phrase of sufficient delicacy, grasped an imaginary bottle by the neck and placing it to his mouth, brought it to the perpendicular.

A slight pause succeeded.

"Well, to be frank, he does take a few glasses more than he used to," confessed Zéphyrine, "but the distressing part is that he is no different after he has taken them than he was before."

"Ah," commented Polycarpe, shaking his head, "that's bad, that!"

"But what is a poor woman to do?" madame went on, now quite mollified by her neighbor's frank and kindly attitude. "One can only hope for a better frame of mind."

"It is a great pity," observed Polycarpe, and filled in a sympathetic pause by dexterously blowing his nose without the aid of a handkerchief.

"Perhaps there is something on his mind—perhaps the *curé* might, in that case—"

Mme Pouget, with a shudder and a shrug, expressed her lack of faith in the power of any remon-

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strance the *curé* might make. A silence lasting nearly a minute was broken by Polycarpe. His fertility in expedient was again brilliantly exemplified.

“*Sacré!* I beg your pardon, madame, but an idea came to me so suddenly that I was a trifle taken by emotion. . . . Have you never seen the advertisements which abound in the papers, of cures for this most unhappy failing?”

“A cure for it? No, I have not read of such a thing. My family duties leave me little time for reading or any other relaxation, for that matter. . . .”

“Well, that was a fortunate idea, then. . . . Why, even this morning, in the paper, *La Presse*, of Wednesday before last, I remember seeing such an advertisement. . . . Listen madame, there is no time like the present. If you will wait here, I will go to my house and get it. . . . It is no trouble.” With which words he was off, and Mme Pouget returned to her dandelion gathering, a tremulous hope rising in her bosom.

It was not long before Polycarpe came back with the journal containing promise of redemption for the unhappy victims of the demon that dwells in the cup. There, assuredly, lay the way of salvation! Simple, infallible, and explained in the most comforting and elegant language. . . . A beacon for the despairing. . . .

It was quickly agreed between them that this remedy must be applied as soon as possible; no time should be allowed to elapse else the vice would gain a firmer hold on the victim. Polycarpe, with a gener-

osity that wrung tears from Mme Pouget's eyes, insisted on advancing the money for the purchase of the philtre, and carrying out all the negotiations. Mme. Pouget promised to come up to the field in five days time, when the treatment was scheduled to arrive. This was her own idea, for she knew that if she went out by the road, Onesiphore would learn that she had been to the Begins, his enemies, and not only would she be risking a terrible explosion, but perhaps the ruin of the whole scheme. Polycarpe agreed. The aroma of secrecy was not unpleasant to his romantic soul. They parted with assurances of mutual esteem.

The fifth day dawned. The rendezvous was kept, but unhappily, Polycarpe had to report that the cure had not arrived. He was certain it would come tomorrow. They agreed to meet again. But on the morrow, the post brought nothing. The delay was most annoying, and would necessitate another meeting, several meetings . . . the effect of which was not apparent to the benevolent conspirators.

Onesiphore was beginning to be rather bored with his self-imposed renunciation of the world. The pose had been amusing for a while; he had had some exquisite moments of commiserative introspection. But his adventurous spirit now craved action; he wished to feel again the shock of conflict. What if he *had* met defeat in the matter of the sheep-raising? Heavens, it was not due to any cleverness on the part of that idiot, Polycarpe, or the rest of the villagers; it was due to sheer bad luck. It would perhaps be

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better to give up this unmanly moping and re-enter the old life. It would not be long before he would find a way to pay out those who had mocked him in his misfortune, and to regain all of his old ascendancy.

Turning these thoughts over in his mind, he resolved at length that his silence should end. He began to elaborate a discourse for the ears of Mme. Pouget, principally on the theme of the falling off in her housewifery—notably in her cooking. He walked about, finding in the rhythmic pacing of the kitchen an aid to the discovery of energetic and rhetorical forms. In one of his perambulations, he came to the window and gazed out towards the Begin farm, seeking a coy adjective the while. The movement of two figures suddenly brought him back from his creative efforts to the world of fact. His wife and. . . . Polycarpe Begin! What had she to do with that man? His enemy! Mockers and defamers! Things were coming to a pretty pass if a man's wife should consort with those who had put public shame on him. . . . There was something sinister here! They were quite close together . . . talking animatedly. . . . This must be investigated! What innocent purpose could Zéphyrine possibly have in conversing with Polycarpe?

He had noticed the strangeness of her behavior, when he came to think of it. At first, she had scolded him when she found she could do it without fear of retaliation on his part; but latterly, she had scarcely spoken save by means of malignant looks. . . . He had felt her eyes upon him when his back was turned!

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It was quite an inexplicable thing—a thing he could not have believed, without seeing it with his own eyes . . . that Zéphyrine should sneak off to meet Polycarpe Begin! Why, she had always professed the utmost contempt for the fool—so much so that he had sometimes been tempted to take his side in argument. . . . But evidently that had been a blind. They were standing very close together, it seemed. He was pressing her hand—they parted. Polycarpe had disappeared. Zéphyrine was returning to the house.

Onesiphore was frankly floored by this new development. Of all unexpected things! But—here—at any rate was something to fight against . . . something he could get his teeth into! One thing was certain—he would not now change his attitude of brooding and dejection. Evidently, the guilty ones had counted on his apparent oblivion to everything to indulge in these open rendezvous—they had become indifferent to disguise. Well, he would leave them in their false security, he would make sure of the facts, and then prepare some horrible trap in which the evil-doers would be caught. Then, punishment would follow—punishment that would be brought to the knowledge of the whole parish and prove to them that the honor of Onesiphore Pouget was not to be infringed; that his vengeance was inevitable and crushing!

Onesiphore's spying was effective. The third day after his amazing discovery, he saw Zéphyrine hurrying to the rendezvous again. So it was true! Con-

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firmed were his suspicions. Well, they should see what they should see! If only he had a telescope, or could conceal himself somewhere where he would be able to have a better view of the intriguers, perhaps be able to hear their conversation! The topography, however, was not favorable to this design.

Onesiphore chafed at his impotence to penetrate the wicked schemes that were doubtless brewing between the two shameless ones. His imagination ran riot; he imputed the most improbable dialogues and intentions to his wife and his neighbor. He would have been vastly surprised could he have heard what actually took place when Polycarpe advanced with a triumphant smile, bearing a small package in his hand.

“Madame, the period of waiting is over; the time for action is at hand. Here is the medicine.”

Polycarpe opened the parcel, seized on the printed directions and began to read them aloud, commenting on each point and offering his own interpretation and suggestions, where all did not seem clear.

“‘In tea or coffee.’ . . . Evidently, as Onesiphore does not care for coffee, it must be in tea. . . . ‘One of the powders. . . . It will not be noticed by the subject’. . . . That is as well, otherwise there might be difficulties. . . . From my knowledge of the character of Onesiphore, I am *sure* there would be difficulties. . . . ‘The treatment is to be repeated until the craving for alcohol has entirely subsided in the person afflicted’. . . . That will not be long, I hope. . . . Yes. . . . ‘an improvement should be noted

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after the third or fourth dose. The duration of the treatment depends upon the hold which the habit has taken'. . . . Fortunately, madame, it is not of long standing in the case we have to deal with. . . . There seems nothing of any difficulty in the directions. Only read them and you will be able to do what is necessary. Well, it seems to me that there is no more to be said. I shall await with the utmost expectancy the report of the progress you are making. Perhaps, if it would be agreeable to you, we might again meet—say three days from now. . . . I shall not detain you. . . . I can comprehend how anxious you are to put the cure to the test—indeed there is no time to be lost. . . . *Au revoir*, madame!"



THE STEAMING GREEN TEA HAD AN UNFAMILIAR ZEST

CHAPTER XV: THERAPY

PREPARATIONS for the meal at which the great experiment was to be tried, were rather nerve-racking for Mme. Pouget. The compound was guaranteed to be tasteless, but suppose the proprietor had been misled by his enthusiasm for his product, and it could actually be detected? Then, there would be a terrible to-do; it might precipitate a physical assault from Onesiphore in his present overwrought state—and the Lord alone knew to what lengths he might go! She would have preferred to taste the drug herself before administering it to Onesiphore, but was fearful of the effect it might have upon her. Besides, every atom of the powder was needed.

Today seemed particularly favorable for estimating the effect of the philtre upon her husband. Onesiphore had made a trip that morning to the farm of

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Zacharie Hurtubise, who, ably assisted by his wife, distilled the best *whiskey blanc* to be had in the township. The full jug stood upon the shelf. It was Onesiphore's habit to start tipping after supper, diluting the alcohol with hot water, and adding sugar. Sometimes he read and drank, sometimes he merely drank and glowered at the stove or lamp, but he usually put away a pint or more of the spirits during the evening. Well, if the medicine was any good, his consumption of alcohol should show a decrease from the normal.

Zéphyrine feared that it would be a difficult matter to introduce the powder into his tea-cup—she never knew, now, when his eyes would be fixed upon her—but luck was in her favor, for instead of watching her preparations for the meal, Onesiphore had taken his shot-gun and was cleaning it on the back verandah. His reason for this proceeding may readily be imagined. Thanking heaven for the opportunity thus offered, Mme Pouget poured out the steaming green tea, stirred in the dose vigorously, added milk and sugar according to her husband's preference, dished up the rest of the dinner and called him in to eat.

Reluctantly, he abandoned his occupation. He had finished cleaning the gun and was indulging in some aiming and trigger-pulling practice at various logs which were waiting to be split into cord-wood. His imagination invested them with the form and features of Polycarpe. It was a stimulating pastime.

At Zéphyrine's summons, however, he entered, set down the gun and began to eat. Not immediately did he take a draught of tea, and it happened that

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Zéphyrine was looking elsewhere at the time. He had only swallowed a mouthful when he became aware of a strange and penetrating flavor. He set down his cup, and was about to remonstrate violently, when a hair-raising idea came to him and stilled his tongue. Zéphyrine and Polycarpe in illicit relations with each other—no doubt wishing him out of the way—and now, this strange taste in his tea! Obviously, an attempt to poison him!

He darted a piercing look at her back, as she bent to draw a pie from the oven. She was acting her part well, but now he remembered that she had seemed to eye him queerly while he was eating. Cold perspiration broke out on his forehead—had he already swallowed enough of the deadly philtre to be fatal? Then another and more soothing idea came—perhaps the rank flavor could be traced to some mere carelessness in her culinary efforts. . . . only three days ago the tea had an unfamiliar zest, and investigation disclosed that an onion, by some oversight which she could not explain, had been left in the tea-pot. The present peculiarity might have a similar innocent origin. A second's thought led Onesiphore to the conclusion that if this were the case, the whole pot of tea would be infected, while if she really had attempted poisoning, only his cup would contain the dose. Some stratagem was necessary to get her out of the way for a moment until he could investigate. Casting about for one, he looked through the window and found it.

"One of the cows has got into the garden and is

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regaling herself with your lettuces," he announced.

Zéphyrine straightened up with an exclamation of annoyance, set down the pie and rushed out to deal with the offending animal.

"How many times have I told you that fence should be mended? But you do nothing, all the long day. . . ."

Her voice trailed off, and shortly was heard, raised once more, as she pursued the guilty beast round the kitchen garden.

Onesiphore, paying no attention, rose swiftly, carried the cup to the sink, threw out the contents, rinsed it, returned to the table and poured himself a fresh cup. Gingerly, he tasted it. It was perfectly normal! What now was he to do? Should he seize the adulteress—the would-be murderess—by the throat, and extort full confession? No. . . . she would deny everything, and if he proceeded to extreme measures, it might well happen that his just rage would get the better of him, and he would inflict on her the death she had designed for him. Then he would be in a terrible position. . . . And he would have no evidence to justify himself! Trembling, but calm, he planned his actions. First of all, he must not let her perceive by any sign that her plot had been frustrated. He would not drink the rest of his tea, which would induce her to think that a mere chance had saved him. He would begin on the whiskey—one drink, only; that, he needed to steady his nerves; more, would take away his self-control and he would not be able to deceive her. Rapidly, he poured him-

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self a glass, and when Zéphyrine returned, he was sipping it. Without looking at her, he growled that he was ready for pie. While he consumed that delicacy, tasting it very carefully to make sure that it, too, had not been doctored, he thought of the course to be pursued. In spite of his agitation, his ideas were clear. He could not remain in the house a day longer, for it was obvious that she would make a second attempt, and though he had detected the taste in time tonight, on another occasion he might be less fortunate. Not another mouthful of her cooking would he eat; that, he resolved upon. He must invent an excuse to go away.

Where should he go . . . and what would he do? He did not intend to be driven from his home by these conspirators against his honor and his life. But he must have clear evidence against them. Another inspiration came to him; he would tell Zéphyrine he was going on a journey that would keep him away for a considerable period. He would indeed depart, but would return secretly, the same day. Burning with lust, the guilty lovers would rush into each other's arms. He would spy on them, which would be easy, for they would suspect nothing; and when he was assured that they were in a compromising situation, he would procure witnesses and descend on them, finding them *en flagrant délit*! A complete and excellent scheme! The rest was a matter of details . . . Embroidery. But they had thought to pull the wool over his eyes, had they? That he was of no more account . . . sunk in dejection . . . a

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mere encumbrance . . . to be disposed of ruthlessly, as one would slaughter a woodchuck? The imbeciles! They should see!

Nearly an hour passed however, before he hit upon a reasonable excuse for his departure. Meanwhile, sitting in a brown study, he finished his glass but had no further recourse to the jug. Zéphyrine remarked this forbearance with delight. One mouthful only of the medicine—for she had noted carefully the quantity of tea that been left in the cup—and though at first the longing for liquor had been so great that he could not wait to finish his meal, the potion had taken effect, and he had drunk no more. That was something remarkable! It was like magic. If now she could only manage to get the remainder of the package down his gullet, beyond doubt, he would be entirely cured.

At length, Onesiphore coughed melodiously, and remarked:

“I have formed the resolution to go away for a few days. I find myself somewhat *ennuyé*. It is years since I have been out of the parish. When a man spends too long a period in the society of clod-pates, he runs the risk of becoming like them. Therefore, I will go to some larger centre where I may enjoy more civilized society.”

Zéphyrine looked at him with astonishment. What strange fancy was this? It must be a collateral result of the anti-alcoholism treatment. She hoped his mind had not been affected.

“Apart from that, I have today received a letter

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from Osias Patelin." He waved a letter vaguely in the air. It was actually from his nephew, Herménégilde Pouget, the Montreal lawyer, and contained certain propositions which bore the promise of very interesting developments, and which certainly would have excited Onesiphore's fascinated attention if this domestic development had not arisen. "Osias Patelin," he continued, "is as you know, engaged in extensive commercial affairs. He wishes to consult me in regard to some of them. He is for the present, located in Sherbrooke. We may perhaps have a profitable speculation together."

Zéphyrine expressed a devout hope that Onesiphore did not intend to purchase another motor-car. He merely glowered at this interruption, and went on:

"So, for these several reasons, I shall leave on the early morning train from Harrietteville and will remain in Sherbrooke for four days, or perhaps a week. Osias has invited me to be his guest during this period so I shall not be put to much expense. I trust that you will be able to operate the farm in my absence without committing too many imbecilities."

Zéphyrine thought that as she had been doing practically all the work about the place for the past month, Onesiphore's absence would make little difference but she did not put this idea into words.

"Make a good substantial pair of sandwiches, or three; and give me some pie. I shall possibly be hungry before I arrive in Sherbrooke."

Zéphyrine hastened to obey this behest. Thinking

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things over she came to the conclusion that the trip, provided that he got into no mischief while away, might do him good. It was evident that he had shaken free from his gloom and the activity and the journey would in some degree probably complete the cure. She made one or two queries as to the nature of the enterprize in which he was to be associated, but was scarcely surprised that these questions were ignored. Such was Onesiphore's way ! He never deigned to discuss his business with her ; she only asked because she considered it polite to show an interest.

Soon, the lunch was made. Onesiphore went off to change into his best suit of clothes and overcoat, and when he came downstairs again told her abruptly to go to bed. He would, he informed her, sit in the kitchen for an hour or so and then set out for Harrietville. Dutifully, Zéphyrine climbed the stairs, making up her mind to listen until she heard him leave. But the ease of her bed after an active day during which she had been keyed up to a considerable pitch of excitement, betrayed her, and succumbing to physical and emotional exhaustion, she slept soundly until daylight the next morning.



HYPNOTIZED BY THE VISION

CHAPTER XVI: AMBUSH

HER first thought was that Onesiphore must be many miles distant, on the way to Sherbrooke. Actually, he was not far away. He had gone to Harrietville, purchased a ticket to Sherbrooke, chatted with the station agent, and got on the train. This was in case Polycarpe took the precaution to ascertain whether he had really left the district. From his knowledge of his neighbor, he did not expect him to go to this trouble, but admitted that there was no telling what effect love will have on a man; with Polycarpe it might have the result of making him passably intelligent.

When the train began to move from the station, Onesiphore dropped off on the opposite side and took cover in the darkness. Watching until the station agent retired to his quarters above the waiting-room

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—there would be no other train for twelve hours—Onesiphore stealthily emerged from his hiding, and set out on the road back to the Sixth Range. He reached his property just as dawn was breaking. Avoiding the farmhouse, he struck across the fields and entered a copse on a hillock, some four hundred yards from the road. It was an excellent point of observation . . . he could see both his own and Polycarpe's house, and the fields lying in between. He would be able to detect any movement, and could himself remain hidden beyond the possibility of detection. This place had immediately occurred to him when he had been planning his campaign.

A light drizzle had been falling. There was also a raw, searching wind. Onesiphore shivered, and keeping well within the screen of the woods, hunted about for a lurking place where he would be sheltered from the wind and still would have the view that he required. Nothing entirely satisfactory was to be found. He crouched down in the lee of a large maple and drew his overcoat tightly round him. The rain was coming down more briskly now, and the foliage was getting saturated. At first, none of the moisture had penetrated, but now drips began to fall from all the branches and further increased his discomfort, compelling him to shift his position every few minutes. He felt extremely weary, having been awake all night and having walked ten miles into the bargain. His feet were sore. He was cramped from the uncomfortable positions he had to assume and he cursed the hardness of the ground.

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For some time, there was no sign of life in the farms below him. Then, smoke rose from the chimneys and shortly afterwards Zéphyrine and Polycarpe were observed setting forth after their respective herds of cows. He could see them both, but due to the conformation of the ground, they did not see each other. They did not have far to go after the cattle, which soon were back in the barnyard. Milking followed, then a pause for breakfast. The drizzle had steadied into a downpour of rain that looked good for all day. Neither of them would be working outside, Onesiphore concluded. He expected however that Zéphyrine would make some excuse to go over to the Begins and confide the news of his departure to Polycarpe. He ate his sandwiches about seven o'clock. The food warmed him, and he began to feel drowsy. This wouldn't do—he must keep awake. Then the rain abated slightly, and he felt more comfortable. Too comfortable, in fact, for again and again he caught himself on the point of slumber. Leaving his shelter, he prowled gingerly through the underbrush and succeeded in getting thoroughly soaked to the knees. Exhaustion overtook him—his strength was ebbing away, and his legs wobbled. He looked down at his home and thought longingly of the warm stove and his accustomed rocker with the well-worn cushion. . . . dry clothes, a steaming glass of whiskey and water, and a large platter full of Zéphyrine's *fêves au lard*, piping hot! Hypnotized by the vision, he stood gazing into space, supporting himself by the trunk of a small birch. In that moment

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his resolution wavered, and he was on the point of abandoning his enterprize and returning to his fire-side, when he thought of the tea . . . and shuddered.

No, he could not go back until he had resolved his doubts, at any rate. It was all very well to day-dream, of the excellent food his wife could prepare—but how about the sinister ingredients which he suspected? No, better to support privation for a few hours, or a day, than to risk poisoning. In a flash, he saw himself writhing on the floor of the kitchen, while Zéphyrine stood by, jeering at his throes, until the death-rattle should come in his throat. . . . He resumed his melancholy tramping.

Glancing towards Polycarpe's house, he observed the putative love-pirate hitching Babette into the buggy. Onesiphore wondered if he had somehow missed seeing Zéphyrine slip over to the Begins. He was certain that Polycarpe was off to the station at Harrierville to confirm his rival's departure. But no, he drove in the other direction—towards Saint-Epistemon. What could he be up to? It was strange for him to go away at this hour of the morning. Perhaps, after all, he had heard nothing from Zéphyrine. Onesiphore mused. It was evident that nothing would occur for some hours. More accursed waiting about in this detestable copse, cold and miserable! However, since there was no reason to keep a keen lookout, he might take the occasion to rest for half an hour. He returned to his first shelter behind the maple, and sat down with a grunt of relief. Dragging his overcoat

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round him, he leaned back against the rough trunk and closed his eyes. His last thought as he sank into oblivion, was that the ground was confoundedly wet.

Polycarpe's journey was for the purpose of buying in the next parish a Holstein calf from a farmer who had a milch herd of excellent class. It was some distance away, and he did not return until considerably after dinner time. In the interval, Mme Pouget had run across and informed Mme Begin of Onesiphore's sudden resolution to go to Sherbrooke. This news was repeated to Polycarpe while he was eating dinner, and almost caused him to swallow his spoon. However, he succeeded in mastering his emotion, and observed that one never knew what the old imbecile would be up to next. He would not be surprised to hear of his being implicated in a bank robbery or the burning of a church! M. Begin felt a pang of disappointment that the medicinal treatment was interrupted and wondered if Zéphyrine had administered the first dose, also if that had had anything to do with Onesiphore's leaving. His curiosity was intense but as Zenobie had been kept in the dark as to the benevolent plot for Onesiphore's reclamation from the vice of toping, he felt that he could not very well manifest any undue haste in going down to the Pougets and interviewing the grass widow.

Onesiphore woke with a start about three o'clock. Having no watch, he had no idea of the time. The rain had again begun to come down hard, and he found himself sitting in a pool of water. One leg was

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asleep, and he ached in every inch of his frame. With some difficulty he drew himself to his feet and tottered round until his circulation was in some degree restored. He peered at the farmhouses below. Nothing stirred. He wondered whether any of the drama had been missed. Polycarpe might have returned and spent hours with Zéphyrine—might be there even now! Then an impulse to descend and verify or disprove this suspicion was discarded as it occurred to him that certainly he would be seen if he moved from the copse, and if Polycarpe did not happen to be in his house, all this trouble would be wasted. No, it would be better to stick out the vigil until he saw something definite. But he cursed his weakness in succumbing to sleep.

Having once started cursing, he found many matters that required maledictory mention—Polycarpe, Zéphyrine, the wind, the rain, the weather generally, and most particularly the bush in which he found himself. If words could harm, the trees would have been blasted and withered as if seven thousand bolts of lightning had struck there.

But all his energetic language could not make him warm, and he stood miserably, teeth chattering, first on one leg and then on the other. Next he would take a turn through the bush. Hunger was beginning to torment him. Time and again, he wondered if he could survive until dark, and if he would then have the strength to carry out the plan he had made, suppose he *did* find his wife and her paramour in a compromising position! Often, his thoughts turned with

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longing to the abandonment of his scheme, but every time he called up sufficient reserves of determination to grit his teeth, and hang on. The afternoon seemed interminable.

At length, when it was nearly dusk, his patience was rewarded. He observed Polycarpe come into the barnyard, cast a rapid glance around, (Look well, Polycarpe; you will not see me, here!) and set off at a rapid pace by the road, to the Pouget farm. He went round to the back door, knocked, and was admitted. Success!

Onesiphore strode out of his hiding place, fatigue and hunger forgotten now, and plunged down the hillside. In a few minutes, he was in the barnyard. He must move stealthily. It was practically dark, and the lamp in the kitchen was lighted. Standing outside of the light which streamed through the window, Onesiphore craned his head. Ah, he could see them! They were sitting by the fire. It was slightly disappointing that at first sight, their attitude was not very compromising. They were talking briskly. Polycarpe had a glass in his hand. The pig! He was being entertained with a portion of the contents of the jug, bought only yesterday. And Zéphyrine also had a glass! This was something to make one sit up. He had not known that she indulged herself in this manner. In the past, occasionally—at the New Year or other important feasts—of course, but now it appeared she had the habit of swilling in private. This explained the rapid lowering of the whiskey, which had often puzzled him. Well. . . he had seen enough! They

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were going to make an evening of it. . . . fuddle themselves with ardent spirits, and then. . . . Faugh, disgusting! But he could promise them a surprise! They burst out into a hearty roar of laughter. So! They might laugh now—doubtless they were laughing at the simple husband who had gone away and left them free to indulge their guilty love. They would soon laugh in a different fashion. But there was no time to be lost.

As stealthily as he had come, Onesiphore quitted the barn-yard and set off down the road to Saint-Epistemon, half walking and half running. He felt his exhaustion coming on again. Never mind, he could hold out until he got to Alphonse Thibadeau's, then the worst would be over. In ten minutes, he was at that good man's door, and Alphonse came running to his urgent hammering.

"But, Onesiphore, *mon vieux*, what have you?"

Thibadeau fell back, appalled at Onesiphore's appearance. Dressed in his best clothes which were badly rumpled and muddy, he looked as though he had seen a ghost—or was one, himself.

"Alphonse, my friend, for the love of the good God," he gasped, "quickly harness your horse! We must drive to the village, at once. . . . As a friend, I beg it of you, and that you will not waste time with questions."

"But why. . . ." began the dumbfounded Alphonse, when he was cut short.

"It is a matter of life and death. . . . More, I cannot say. If you will make haste, you shall see soon

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enough! Meanwhile, if Mme Thibadeau could give me a glass of whiskey—I am nearly at the end of my strength. . . .”

He slumped into a chair, the picture of the reaction that follows extreme effort. Alphonse saw that there was indeed something urgent. If the old man would not tell him now—well, it would not be kind to insist. He would do what was asked and trust that his curiosity would soon be rewarded. He was not unaccustomed to acting first and thinking afterwards. Shouting directions to his wife to provide the cordial asked for, he rushed out to the barn, and in a very short time had his horse in the rig and drove round to the front door.

“I am here, and ready, Onesiphore. Julie, bring out my hat and coat. . . .”

Onesiphore gulped down the remainder of the glass, which had been half filled with *whiskey blanc*, and stumbled down the steps into the rig. Alphonse’s wife followed with her husband’s garments and in a second they were off.

“To the store of Télémache Bedaud! And as fast as your old mare can move her legs,” cried Onesiphore, reviving under the stimulant.

His excitement communicated itself to Alphonse, who lashed the old roan with the end of the reins and stirred her into a clumsy canter. The vehicle rocked from side to side of the road, leaping from bump to rut, and from rut to puddle. Alphonse made one more attempt to find out the motive for this wild drive in the darkness, but Onesiphore pleaded for patience

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and promised a most astounding revelation in only half an hour. With that, the driver had to be content. They made the two miles to Saint-Epistemon in less than a quarter of an hour, and Onesiphore leapt out at the store.

"Drive to Jean-Baptiste Lariviere's, and tell him what I have told you—that it is a matter of life and death, and I demand that he come. Then to Dr. Morin—tell him the same—also, that his professional services may be required before the night is spent."

Alphonse like a good soldier obeyed unquestioningly, and Onesiphore, finding the store in darkness, went round to the back to alarm T  l  mache.

The messenger did his work very well. In not quite twenty minutes he was back with the two men named—the doctor in his own buggy with his half-bred roadster (the fastest horse in the township, as he boasted), and Jean-Baptiste panting behind Thibadeau. T  l  mache and Onesiphore were waiting in front of the store.

"Gentlemen," said Onesiphore, in a low but fervent tone, "I beg that you will drive to my home. There is a matter on foot which must be seen to. . . . I ask for your moral support as married men, as heads of families. . . . Witnesses are essential. I beg that you will excuse me from saying more, at present. . . . You will learn the reason for my agitation in a short enough time. . . . Allow me to take my place beside you, *M. le Docteur*, and you other gentlemen, kindly follow. *En avant!*"

The doctor formed the private opinion that Onesiphore

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phore had, at last, become completely insane. He had some tremors about being alone with him in the buggy, and took care not to drive so fast that he would outdistance Alphonse, whose nag was now somnolent and jaded. Yes, Onesiphore was undoubtedly a dangerous maniac. The doctor was of the opinion that the old fellow had been mentally unbalanced for years, and it was obvious that he grew worse as he grew older. Probably he had murdered Zéphyrine in some brutal and appalling manner, and now was by a strange quirk of the demented, bringing them all to view the gory scene. Morin's teeth chattered more than Onesiphore's had done while he waited in the copse. The old man, who had had another stiff glass of whiskey in Télémaque Bedaud's kitchen was silent, and felt in command of the situation. His combinations were working out in brilliant fashion. He would triumph and vindicate himself. Also, in a manner above any reproach.

It was not long before they drew up in front of the Pouget place. It was in darkness. The lovers had not remained long at their drinking. Onesiphore trembled with rage when he thought of what lechery might even now be going on behind those concealing walls. With a shout that was half a groan, he leaped out of the rig.

"Follow me, gentlemen," he called, hoarsely, and darted round to the rear of the dwelling. The others were not far behind him, everyone keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement. By the time they turned the corner, Onesiphore had entered the house. There

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was a muffled crash as he bumped into some article of furniture. A shrill scream from the upper story checked every heart for a beat.

"Aii-ee! Murder! Thieves!" screeched Zéphyrine.

The sound of the invasion rendered her almost senseless with terror. Her nerves had been on the jump ever since Polycarpe had left. The countryside was quiet, but who knew what might happen to a lone female?

"It is I, your husband . . . base woman!" roared Onesiphore, fumbling frantically round the kitchen and knocking a pile of plates to the floor. Striking a match, he located a lamp and lighted it. The other men entered, and stood ranged against the wall by the door. A bump sounded on the floor overhead, followed by a pattering, and Mme Pouget appeared at the foot of the stairs, in her nightdress, a skirt flung over her shoulders. Every face, except Onesiphore's, expressed utter bewilderment, but hers was the blankest of all. The doctor scanned her closely, looking for marks of violence. None were apparent. However, she might have been struck on the back of the head with some blunt instrument he thought, hopefully.

"So you confront me, shameless one," bellowed Onesiphore, glaring like a tiger. "Where is your filthy lover?"

"Lov—love—lover? Gentlemen, protect me—he is completely mad!"

"No doubt you think so, but I am not such a fool as you think!"

Lifting his head, he shouted, still louder (though

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a minute ago that would have seemed impossible): "Come down from your hiding-place, Polycarpe Begin, and face the man you have wronged!"

Everyone stood as if turned to stone. There was a dead silence. Then Onesiphore, white as chalk, rushed to the stairs. His wife, with a shriek, placed herself behind the bulky Jean-Baptiste Larivière. Onesiphore could be heard careering about the upper story, a series of crashes and oaths marking the progress of his search. Every now and then, he invited Polycarpe to come forth and have his heart eaten.

The men downstairs looked from one to the other. Eventually, Télémache questioned Zéphyrine.

"When did he begin to carry on in this fashion?"

Zéphyrine's tongue was loosened, and she recounted the history of his sudden departure for Sherbrooke, and explained that until five minutes ago she had supposed him to be there. She was still talking when Onesiphore descended. As he entered the room, the others regarded him warily. Disappointment and rage struggled for the mastery on his face.

"Gentlemen," he began, hollowly, "the villain who has wrecked my home, who has stolen the love of my wife, has escaped me this time. Zéphyrine, you do not need to cower behind that man—I am not one to take vengeance on a woman, however she has wronged me."

Mme Pouget, thus encouraged, stood forth and delivered herself of some of the emotion that boiled within her.

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“Beast! Brute! What are you saying? I am an honest woman, me! Of what do you accuse me? Hide your face for shame. . . . Me, that has slaved for you, and these last many months has done all the work of the farm while you sulked in the kitchen. . . . Me, to be accused of this! In front of these gentlemen, too! What do you mean? Speak, before I set about you with my nails!”

“Silence! I suppose you will deny that you have been meeting Polycarpe Begin secretly every night for weeks—that he was here, in my kitchen, drinking with you this very night—besides doing I don’t know what, when I was not here to see? Answer that! Adulteress!”

Zéphyrine uttered a piercing scream and fell back into Jean-Baptiste’s arms. He clutched her under the armpits and sustained her in a semi-upright position, albeit with some difficulty.

“Onesiphore,” exclaimed Télémache, “you make grave assertions. You may be doing your wife a foul wrong. What proof have you?”

“I have the proof which my eyes afford,” returned Onesiphore, ponderously, folding his arms and turning away.

Zéphyrine recovered slightly. The doctor filled a cup from the tap and flicked water delicately in her face. She stood up, gulped once or twice, and declared:

“Hear me, gentlemen! This is the truth, as God sees me! I have indeed talked often to Polycarpe of late, and I thought that no one saw us. I was mis-

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taken. It was all innocent. Figure this to yourselves. For the past two months nearly, this man has done hardly a hand's turn about the place. While I wear my fingers to the bone trying to keep things up, he sits in the kitchen, moping, saying nothing. . . . he that was always babbling. . . . Worse, he is drinking continually. You would not believe the amount he drinks—it is something altogether vicious. . . . and for no purpose, whatever. . . . never once has he been drunk. Now, I ask you, gentlemen, is there not something wrong about that? One day, I happen to see Polycarpe. I tell him of my troubles and fears—a poor woman in my case is glad of sympathy, no matter whence it comes. . . . I swear I care nothing for Polycarpe Begin, in fact, to myself I called him a simpleton.”

Onesiphore, his face still turned away, gave forth a derisive grunt.

“Listen, now, to what your wife says,” cautioned Télémache, reprovingly. Murmurs from the other men indicated to Zéphyrine that she had gained their sympathy.

“Polycarpe suggests to me that I try a powder which is a cure for the alcoholism. It is put in the tea.” Here, Onesiphore gave a start and turned, fixing his eyes on his wife. She went on, undaunted:

“For nearly a week, I used to meet Polycarpe to inquire whether the medicine had come. He sent for it, and paid the money, himself. I could not meet him openly, for Onesiphore would have suspected the worst, as you see, would have refused the dose, and

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all would have been spoiled. This is the secret—and for that I am accused of. . . . These long years married, and. . . . I. . . .” Here the excellent Zéphyrine’s rage dissolved into floods of tears, and she sobbed, noisily.

“Did you. . . .” Onesiphore had to clear his throat before he could go on, “did you say that you put this filth in my *tea*?” His Adam’s apple rose and fell with the stress of his emotion. Zéphyrine nodded, energetically.

“Where is it, then?” he demanded.

“On the top shelf, in the cupboard.”

He went to the cupboard, groped round and drew down a small packet. He stared at it in his hand as though he held the poison ring of the Borgias.

Télémache broke the silence.

“It seems to me, Onesiphore, that you have indeed wronged your wife in a manner most grievous. . . . To take away her good name, so. . . .”

“A more excellent woman is not in the parish,” pronounced Alphonse Thibadeau. “How good she has been to you. . . . You should take shame to yourself to have had such suspicions.”

“Onesiphore, you have shown yourself unworthy of your good wife. You should beg her forgiveness most humbly and strive by treating her kindly, to make up to her for this cruelty,” said the doctor.

“You have shown yourself an old fool in this matter,” blurted out the powerful Larivière. “A jealous old fool, by damn! What nonsense!”

Onesiphore stiffened. He looked from one to the

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other. Every eye met his, fearlessly. Reprobation was in every glance. Their hostility struck on his proud spirit like a lash. But he would meet it. His lip curled, and gallantly he shaped his mouth to the old sardonic grin.

“So, Onesiphore Pouget is a jealous fool, eh? Thank you for your opinion, gentlemen! It seems I am mistaken, this time. Well! You will go home and laugh about this. . . . You will make the old Pouget the laughing-stock of the parish. I know you are too great cowards to laugh at me to my face. You think you will do so, behind my back with all the other imbeciles, your comrades! Recollect this well—I will not be here for you to point the finger of scorn at! No! You may laugh . . . but I shall not be obliged to hear it! Gentlemen, remark that I still use the forms of politeness, though more appropriate terms are in my mind . . . *you have seen me for the last time!*”

With this, he raised his hands above his head, and flung the packet of powder down at their feet where it burst and flew upwards like a miniature bomb. He turned on his heel, unlocked the front door and passed out.

Zéphyrine half rose to pursue and call him back, but Jean-Baptiste detained her.

“Be quiet, Madame Pouget,” he counselled. “He will return, when he is more calm. It will be better to treat him with tact. But he has had a good lesson.”

The others expressed assent in varying terms.

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Then Télémache Bedaud observed that they had better be going as there seemed nothing further to do. At this, Zéphyrine protested. She would be terrified to be left alone again that night. Her nerves were shattered. Besides, Onesiphore might come back and who knows what excesses he might be guilty of. They must not leave her!

This problem was solved by Alphonse Thibadeau offering the hospitality of his home—an invitation which she gratefully accepted. She went upstairs to dress, and meanwhile the men debated Onesiphore's last words. He had spoken of going away? Where would he go to? Bah, it meant nothing! The doctor introduced a disquieting thought. . . . Perhaps he had suicide in mind? . . . That was a very common form for insanity to take and it was obvious that, if Onesiphore was not mad, he was on the verge of madness. He shook his head, dubiously. Mme Pouget's footsteps on the stairs was the signal for a loud "ssh," and all filed out of the kitchen, filled with gloomy forebodings.



PRESENTING THE BOOT FOR INVESTIGATION

CHAPTER XVII: PURSUIT

ZEPHYRINE returned to her home on the morrow, and waited hopefully for the return of a remorseful Onesiphore. He did not come. That night she slept again at the Thibadeau's. The next day she followed the same course, but still no Onesiphore. Polycarpe, who had been apprized of the disastrous results of his venture into philanthropy, was inexpressibly grieved. Furthermore, he kept a sharp lookout for danger, avoiding the woods at the back of the farms, and the scrubby sections that might conveniently provide his reasonless neighbor excellent ambush. Polycarpe felt a distinct aversion to being the target for a rifle shot—and Zéphyrine had dwelt at some length on the earnest manner in which her husband had cleaned his gun.

The situation for M. Begin was on all sides dis-

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quieting. Moreover, it was ridiculous, and he was forced to submit to a deal of chaffing by his friends, whose coarseness affronted his more refined sensibilities. "M. Begin, the wrecker of homes; Don Juan Begin . . . the lover of Mme Pouget . . . the *hornifier* of the honest Onesiphore . . ." Idiotic words like that.

At Zéphyrine's request, he made a trip to Harrietteville to see if her husband had left by the train. The station agent averred that Onesiphore had left for Sherbrooke on the night before the scene at the Pouget home. He had seen nothing of the old man since. Warming up to the mystery, he telephoned to the men in charge of the neighboring stations. But they had seen no one answering to Onesiphore's description. Apparently, he had not gone away by rail.

Nobody in the parish had seen him. He had vanished completely. His threat had been carried out, it seemed.

There were two theories advanced to account for his disappearance—one that he had walked to the Gosford highway and had been given a lift that carried him to some distant spot, and the second—whose chief exponent was Dr. Morin—that he had stalked off to some secluded part of the woods and made away with himself, probably by hanging.

Several persons suggested that to resolve the horrid doubts torturing the breast of the abandoned wife, a posse of men should be organized to conduct a careful search through the bush in the vicinity. It was argued that if Onesiphore had killed himself, the

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chances of finding his body were fair, for one in his distraught frame of mind would waste no time over committing the grim deed; he would not penetrate the fastnesses of the interior, but choose a spot easy of access and discovery.

Several days were spent discussing the proposition, which although generally approved, never reached fruition for when candidates for the search party were actually canvassed, it seemed they were all too busy with farming duties to spare the necessary time. Indeed, there were those in the community who hinted that the prospect of finding Onesiphore hanging to a tree would give them the greatest pleasure, but so long as this pleasure could not be assured they declined the honor of performing a neighborly *devoir*, and went on their way to work unconcerned.

About a week after the disappearance, Médéric Lafortune had an inspiration. Bloodhounds should be procured, and set on the trail. Everyone was aware of the uncanny precision of these beasts in tracking fugitives. Two objections were at once raised to the scheme. The first was that the trail by now would be cold—too much time had elapsed for even the most highly-trained of bloodhounds to follow it. Médéric countered this by observing that Onesiphore was a man of very marked characteristics, personal scent being among the most conspicuous. The second and more serious objection was that there were no bloodhounds in the parish; in fact, nobody had ever heard of one being anywhere in the

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province, and only Médéric, himself, had seen a bloodhound years ago in Sherbrooke, with a fifth-rate "Uncle Tom" company.

This appeared to dispose of the bloodhound proposal, but M. Lafortune was not easily moved from his purpose. He did not have so many ideas that he could afford to set them aside without exploring all their possibilities. Lacking a bloodhound, was there not some other keen-scented canine to be found for the job? Why, yes—Evariste Maboule had a dog which, according to its owner, had phenomenal powers of scent and remarkable intelligence. Evariste used him principally for the pursuit of partridges which, when found, the sagacious animal would tree. He would then bark vigorously until Evariste arrived with his gun, redoubling his efforts and indulging in extraordinary antics as the sportsman drew near so as to keep the birds' attention until the fatal shot could be fired. Evariste prized him highly, indeed. He was also an adept in the pursuit of woodchucks.

Médéric, as soon as this expedient had occurred to him, drove out to the Maboule farm and finding Evariste unemployed for the moment, uncovered his plan. Evariste was somewhat doubtful at first as to whether Pitou would be successful at this novel employment, but by adroit flattery, Médéric soon had the other quite enthusiastic about the scheme. Rousing Pitou from a pleasant afternoon nap behind the stove, they set out for the Pouget farm. On the way, they stopped and picked up Polycarpe, who as soon

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as the plan was explained to him, acclaimed it wholeheartedly and announced his intention of accompanying the expedition.

They found Zéphyrine in her garden and rehearsed their intention. She was dubious as to its value but since they were willing to take all the trouble offered no objection.

"It will be necessary, Madame Pouget, to have some article of Onesiphore's clothing so that Pitou can become acquainted with the scent," stated M. Lafortune. "You doubtless know that even the most intelligent animal needs some assistance."

"*Bien*. I will bring his flannel shirt," agreed Zéphyrine.

"One moment, madame. It seems to me that some article more closely identified, so to say—more frequently worn . . . if you will pardon, madame . . . some article with more of a quality—" He gave an expressive sniff and wrinkled his nose. "You can see, yourself, that would be better."

"Very well. I will bring a pair of his old boots."

"One will be sufficient, thank you."

Zéphyrine returned with the required article. They repaired to the front door where Onesiphore had been last seen, and Evariste solemnly called Pitou, presenting the boot for his investigation. The dog gave it a casual sniff, and seemingly finding no interest therein, was about to amble away again, when Evariste seized him by the neck and placed the boot well over his muzzle.

"We will have no mistake about it," he explained.

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Pitou did not seem to relish his novel task, and after a short struggle freed himself. He placed his snout on the ground and scratched vigorously at it with both paws.

"Listen then, Pitou," commanded Evariste, gravely, "follow him, good dog! Do you understand?" He presented the boot once more, whereat Pitou backed away. He then pointed to the ground, and the dog, following his finger, approached and sniffed about. Everyone was rigid with attention. The dog continued his investigations, moving round in aimless circles. His ramblings carried him towards the barn. Glancing back, he hesitated, seemingly not sure of whether he was expected to remain with his master or whether he was at liberty to roam.

"Go on, then, Pitou . . . good dog!" encouraged Evariste. "Find him!"

Reassured, Pitou trotted off and smelled along the front of the barn, round the side to the chicken coop where he made a considerable pause. He seemed more interested now, and snuffed vigorously, his flapping jowls puffing in and out in a ridiculous and consequential manner. Suddenly, he gave a short bark and set off towards the oat-field at a brisk trot, nose to the ground. He gave a glance back, and saw the three men following him, then scrambled under the fence. He turned sharply to the right, gained the side fence and proceeded along it. The men broke into a run.

"*Maudit!* He's found him . . . that's certain!" exulted Polycarpe, between puffs.

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"How that dog is clever . . . one could not believe!" observed the prideful owner. "Never had he anything of that sort to do before, but immediately he comprehends what is required of him!"

Further conversation languished, as all breath was required for the ascent of the hill. Pitou was far in advance, running confidently and scarcely putting his nose to the ground. In a minute, he disappeared in the woods.

Out of breath, the men reached the point where he had entered, and, after a brief consultation, took a path which led to a back pasture, deeper in the bush. Pitou seemed to have gone straight ahead but they expected to cut across his path. At any rate, when he found anything he would bark, and wait until they came.

They had only gone a hundred yards or so when his voice indeed was heard, loud and menacing, but with an undertone of uncertainty. Orienting themselves, they plunged into the bush and stumbled through it, making the best speed they could. Presently they hit an old lumber road, now partially grown up with brush, along which they travelled. Evariste, the youngest of the trio, worked his long legs to such advantage that he was considerably ahead of the others. But presently they joined him in a little clearing, at the far side of which Pitou's tail could be seen waving. He barked strenuously in the direction of a little thicket, approaching it from time to time, and then withdrawing rapidly, as if in fear.

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The men regarded one another with expressions of horror. Only Médéric had thought they would succeed, and even he was shocked by his accomplishment.

"*Dieu!* He is in there—dead!" gasped Polycarpe to Médéric. "The dog fears to enter. Dogs have a fear of the dead, I have heard."

Médéric shook his head, signifying that he was too winded to reply.

Evariste, overpowered with curiosity, reached the dog, and with a word to him plunged into the thicket. Polycarpe and Médéric, who by now had almost come to a walk, saw him struggle to thrust the close-growing saplings aside, bending forward from the hips. He had disappeared from sight, all but his stern, when they heard a stifled cry and saw that he was struggling violently to break away. The trees held him fast, however, and it was a matter of several seconds before he staggered out—tearing at his face and making sounds of unmistakable distress. In fact, he was terribly sick, right in front of them. Appalled, they halted, and cried out to him.

"Evariste . . . by the good God, what is it that you have?" shouted Polycarpe. Then, before Evariste made answer, he understood.

"*Maudit! La bête puante!*"

A skunk! Respectfully, they backed away still further until Evariste's paroxysms should subside. That took some time. They asked him, anxiously, whether he could see, and were very relieved to find that he could. It would have been none too pleasant a task to lead him home by the hand! They endeav-

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ored to impress him with his good fortune, in that none of the fluid had actually got into his eyes, but Evariste obstinately refused to look on this bright aspect of his accident and divided his efforts, during the return to the Pougets, in cursing Pitou's mistaken enthusiasm—promising that misguided animal the most awful punishments, when he had recovered his strength—and lamenting his own soft-hearted acquiescence in the crack-brained proposals of Médéric Lafortune.

Mme Pouget came forth to greet the melancholy cortège but soon retired when Evariste's predicament was announced to her by the evening breeze. She needed no explanations as to their lack of success.

Evariste was driven home in Polycarpe's manure cart, Pitou intelligently following far behind. To do Evariste justice, he did not vent his spite on the indiscreet beast, but it was many years before he lost the nickname of "*le limier*,"—or, in other words, the bloodhound!

A few days later, Zéphyrine sent an urgent demand to Mathilde, advising her that it was time to come back to the homestead. There was no need for her to remain longer in Thetford—the happy event which caused her going having taken place some weeks back. The two women took up residence in their home once more, and carried on stoutly with the harvesting of the oat crop, the digging of potatoes, and all the rest of the healthful exercise so inseparable from the farm. Mathilde had failed to make any impression on the hearts of the male population

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of Thetford. When questioned on the subject, the girl huffily remarked that she had had more to occupy her than to make eyes at the ruffians who worked in the mines. Zéphyrine sighed. What indignities her daughter had suffered, she did not inquire, but there were times when she felt that Mathilde might just as well have gone into a convent when the mood was strong.

She was a good girl, but one could not help observing that she grew daily more like her father.

Osias Patelin arrived in the parish, about a fortnight after Onesiphore's disappearance, and Zéphyrine made a special trip to the village to interview him. There was no result from this investigation, however, for Osias flatly denied that he had ever written Onesiphore, or had any notion of doing business with him. The latter idea appeared to afford the gentleman considerable amusement. He had not even seen Onesiphore for some two months—to tell the truth, he had kept out of the old fellow's way since selling him the car.

As a last resource, Zéphyrine wrote to Herménégilde—the lawyer-nephew in Montreal. It was barely possible that Onesiphore had sought to bury himself in the metropolis. She begged her nephew to put the machinery of the law, which he knew so well, in motion to find the errant husband. Herménégilde replied with a brief but sympathetic letter, saying that he had neither seen nor heard of Onesiphore, but had given his description to the police, so that no doubt if he arrived in Montreal in a state of destitution, he

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would soon be picked up by the vigorous constabulary of that city. He had also visited the morgue, but was happy to say that no corpse of Onesiphore's proportions had occupied a slab since the date of his disappearance. The charitable institutions had also been asked to be on the lookout for him—there was nothing to do now, but wait. He was sure, however—intuition and a knowledge of his uncle's character told him this—that Onesiphore had not made away with himself; rather he was in seclusion, from which he would emerge in his own good time. In the meanwhile Herménégilde counselled patience and a stout heart.

Gradually, the disappearance of the old eccentric ceased to be the first topic of conversation. It was only referred to by way of reminiscence. The parish seemed much quieter since he had gone, and not infrequently, when the notables met in the store after Mass, someone would say:

“It is different now that Onesiphore is no longer here. While he was tiresome at times—well, he had the fashion of amusing one with his ridiculous notions and his wild talk. I wonder where the old one is?”

More than one sigh attested that the Ishmaelite was missed—even by those who had felt the rough side of his tongue.

The first topic of conversation revolved about the transactions of M. Osias Patelin. He had purchased the summer home of Mr. J. Humbert McWhirter, the eminent financier, of Montreal—a humble little

camp, twenty bedrooms or so, with running hot and cold water, electric light plant, hardwood floors, boat-house, etc., located on Lake Wamphamagog, some forty miles from Saint-Epistemon. Mr. McWhirter had had some misfortune on the Stock Exchange, and was under the necessity of retrenchment. Osias' idea was to operate the establishment as a summer hotel. He proposed to put up a number of log cabins for the accommodation of the guests who could not be lodged in the main building. Even now, he had the Poitras boys and two other men employed in erecting the structures. These workmen occasionally came to the parish over the week-ends, and reported progress. They expressed vast surprise that Osias should believe he could persuade rich city folks to forsake their luxurious homes to spend weeks in log huts such as the poorest among the *habitants* would scorn to live in—quarters so cramped that lumber operators would not have dared to provide similar accommodation for the axemen and swampers in the woods. Still, Osias declared that the greater the inconvenience, the more the guests would like it . . . such being the peculiar nature of the Yankees and wealthy dwellers in the larger Canadian cities, from whom he expected to draw his patronage.

“As the old Pouget would say, I am not the fool you think me, messieurs,” he told them. “Wait and see!”



FELT THAT BEARS ARE NOT TO BE FEARED

CHAPTER XVIII: COURAGE

THE winter was over, and the snow was gone, except for wasting drifts which lingered in the shadows of the coniferous woods. The ground was still too wet for ploughing and the farmers, glad to be able to remain in the open air after their long immurement, pottered about at various tasks of repair and maintenance. There are always fences to be mended.

Polycarpe, striding towards the upper pasture with Alphonse Thibadeau, who had come to lend him a hand, set himself to strengthen the *barrage* (a sort of half fence, half abattis) at the back of the farm, which prevented the cattle from straying into the woods. He carried an axe, and Alphonse, a hatchet. Clear sunshine warmed their backs, and a gentle breeze frolicked down from the wooded hills into

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the valleys which were just beginning to mantle with the new green. A glorious day . . . one that quickened the blood and gave one an impulse to break into song! A day to inspire the young with dreams of new loves, and the old with recollections of the *tendresses* of a bygone age. After discoursing agreeably on this latter topic for some time, Alphonse fetched a heavy sigh, and observed:

"Well, truly it is strange that nothing has been heard of the old Onesiphore. I am afraid *le vieux* is indeed dead. He would not have sulked by himself in some city, all this time. Such retirement is not harmonious with his character."

"Well, what if he is dead?" grunted Polycarpe, suddenly surrendered to irritation. "What if he is? He was of no use to anyone—all he did was to make trouble. I am tired of seeing everybody shake their heads and groan about 'poor old Onesiphore'! If they had to live next to him, they would be just as content to have him where he is—in Sherbrooke or in purgatory, or hell . . . I don't know where!"

"Now, Polycarpe, I have heard you yourself say you were sorry that he was gone."

"Well, perhaps, at the first shock. But now that I look at it in a calm light, I recollect that he was no good to anybody—the best he would do for you was to laugh in your face. Who ever heard of Onesiphore doing an action of merit?"

Alphonse was silent for a moment, searching his memory. Then, he burst out:

"It is true, that of late years, he has been on bad

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terms, at one time or another, with everyone in the parish. But it was not always that way. Before he took to reading all those stupid and ungodly books, he was as good a fellow as one could meet. And brave, too. . . .”

“Brave? To frighten women, and men smaller than himself, I suppose?”

“No, he feared nothing! There was not a better axeman in this part of the country than that man. Have you never heard the story of how he killed the bear, and saved Donat Poitras?”

“I have heard something of the story, but I forget just how it happened. I never heard that it was anything extraordinary.”

Alphonse contradicted this last charge, and went on:

“You know, Donat was Onesiphore’s cousin? A good man, also—I often think with sadness of him when I see his girl, and the dirtiness she commits. . . . But there . . . that doesn’t matter. . . . About the bear. . . . I remember the time well. . . . It was before you came to this parish, my friend. On a fine spring day like this, it happened. . . . Donat was engaged in the clearing of his farm on the Tenth Range, and Onesiphore was there to help him. They had been working in the middle of the back field, chopping out a stump or something of the kind, and Donat had gone over to the woods to cut a sapling, taking the big axe along. He climbed over the fence and almost fell on top of a bear cub. He called to Onesiphore to come and see the pretty little animal

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and caught hold of it to prevent it from getting away. Onesiphore had started over when Donat heard a noise behind him, and before he could turn, the she-bear was on him! He had no chance; she struck him with her paw an enormous blow on the shoulder that ripped the flesh away and felled him to the ground. Then she stood over him, daring him to move, I imagine, and savoring her next triumph. Donat did not see her expression, of course, for he kept his face to the ground and tried to protect it with his arms. She must have mangled them with her teeth, and torn his back more with her claws, from the wounds we found on him, but he knew nothing of it, for by that time he had lost his senses with pain.

"Onesiphore came rushing up, not knowing what had happened until he was nearly at the fence and heard the bear growling. It was a sight to make even the bravest pause—Donat on the ground, probably dead, and the bear tearing and biting at him like a fiend. Onesiphore had no weapon, for he had not thought to bring the crowbar he had been working with.

"Now, mark you, my friend, what happened. The axe Donat had dropped on the ground lay between the bear and Onesiphore, but much closer to the bear, within reach of her paws, in fact. Did the old man stop to consider that? He did not! And here is where he showed himself a brave spirit, in truth!

"Without hesitating a second, he leaped over the fence and seized the axe. The bear saw him, let go of Donat and reared herself up to her hind legs. It

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was enough to frighten the devil . . . the great beast, nearly as tall as Onesiphore himself, her little piggy eyes flaming like coals, blood and slaver on her lips and her paws with their cruel talons ready to strike and rend. She launched herself at him with a growl, but Onesiphore did not give way a step. With all his strength, he swung the axe, and it crashed down, taking her between the ears and cleaving her skull almost in two!

"She fell like a log! Onesiphore had no need to strike twice. *There* was the act of a man—the courage and skill! He picked Donat up and carried him on his back down to the farm. They got the doctor and fixed him up in a way, but though he lived for two years more, he could never leave his chair."

Alphonse stopped and removed the perspiration induced by this eloquent recital. It was not often he talked so long.

"That is a fine story," said Polycarpe, moved by the narrative, in spite of himself. "But how did you learn all this? If it was Onesiphore who told you . . . well. . . ."

"*Maudit!* There is no doubt it is true! I saw the bear myself, the next day, and she had the cut in her head, exactly as Onesiphore had said. And when Donat could speak, he told the tale as I have told it to you. So when you say that Onesiphore has never done a good deed, you are wrong! That is a long time ago now, however, and most people have forgotten it."

"Well, perhaps so. I never said that Onesiphore

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had not courage, though he seems to have shown it latterly by bullying and imposing on people. But as for the affair of the bear—I admit it was well done; at the same time, no man could leave a friend in such a situation. Though others might not have been so fortunate as to kill the brute with one blow, there are few that would not have tried their best.”

Alphonse shook his head. “For my part—well, I don’t know. I fear I would have made up my mind that Donat was done for, and gone for a gun! And I bet you that you would have done the same—and nearly any other man that we know, excepting Onesiphore!”

“Not at all,” contradicted Polycarpe. “As a matter of fact, I *have* killed a bear! With a rifle-shot, it is true, but they are not greatly to be feared. . . . Should the occasion arise, I would do my part, as well perhaps as Onesiphore.”

Alphonse looked hard at him, but made no further remark, so Polycarpe had no definite reason for suspecting his acceptance of the statement, still. . . .

They arrived at the *barrage* and set to work to cut brush and saplings which they wove into the structure, to close up the gaps. This work proceeded for half an hour, when Alphonse called Polycarpe to him. The latter came up and discovered his neighbor gazing fixedly at the ground. A path made by the cows last summer, led close to where he was standing, and very distinct in the mud, were the tracks of a bear; the long, flat, man-like footprint, with claws faintly impressed at the toe. Polycarpe felt the

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hair at the back of his neck gently rising as he looked at the sinister spoor. He also felt that he had grown several degrees paler. Glancing at Alphonse, he thought he could detect the same symptoms in him.

The silence grew a little uncomfortable. Neither man wished to be the first to speak. The same thought was in the minds of both. Eventually, Alphonse coughed, and then grinned.

"Those marks didn't come here very long ago," he observed. "But no doubt you are content as you are, with the axe. It was the same with Onesiphore. He felt that bears are not to be feared, just like you."

"Well . . . of course . . ." began Polycarpe, "that is to say . . ."

"I shall leave you for half an hour or so," continued Alphonse, "but on the honor of a gentleman I shall return, well loaded, you understand!"

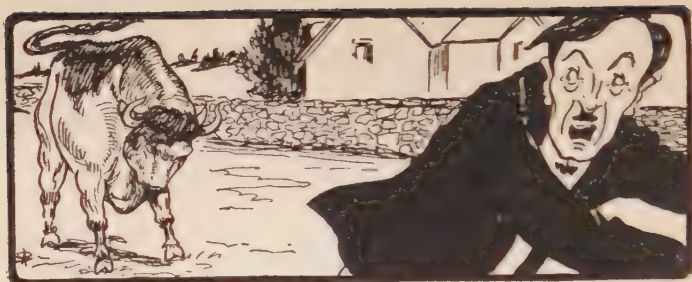
Polycarpe regarded him with an injured air. Then spoke, slowly.

"I think we have done enough here, for today. If you are anxious to go, I shall not remain—not that I care anything for the bear that made these tracks, or twenty of them, but there are several things which ought to be done about the house, and I promised Zenobie I would not neglect them."

The two men walked back to the farm, quite rapidly at first, their pace gradually decreasing as they reached the open fields. Neither of them spoke until the house was reached, and then they merely exchanged "*au revoirs*." The first thing Polycarpe did was to load his rifle, and he did not neglect to

COURAGE

take it with him when he returned to complete work on the *barrage* with Alphonse Thibadeau, a fortnight later. This time, however, they saw no signs of bear, at which they professed to be cruelly disappointed.



AN INSPIRATION CAME TO HIM

CHAPTER XIX: SURVEY

ONE day, shortly after it had been determined by a majority vote in the store of Télémache Bedaud, that summer had come to the parish, a dilapidated Ford drove up the Sixth Range and came to a quivering standstill in front of the Begin homestead. Polycarpe, who had completed the heavy work of the farmer's spring and was now constructing an addition to his hen-house, appeared from behind the barn on hearing the noise.

A stranger sat in the car—a lean and freckled youth, with a lock of sandy hair falling across his forehead from under a shapeless felt hat. He had just lighted a cigarette when Polycarpe came up to him.

"Speak English?" queried the newcomer.

"Oh, yas, a leetle," modestly answered Polycarpe.

"Fine! First human being I've met, today." The

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young man shut off the engine. "Say, can you tell me which is Pouget's farm?"

"Shore! Dat's heem, right dere—de nex' wan to mine."

"Oh!" The stranger looked curiously at the place, then his glance swept up the hills in the rear, and from there travelled down the road. He seemed to be admiring the view, profoundly.

"You want for see Onesiphore Pouget? He's not on de farm, *maintenant!* He's go way for somewhere, an' by damn, no one is know where dat old guy has hide himself!"

"That so?" The information seemed to leave the stranger unmoved. His peculiar attitude roused Polycarpe's hair-trigger curiosity.

"*Pardon*, but have you come for de *affaires*—for de business, dat is?"

"No—not exactly. I'm an engineer. *Arpenteur—ingénieur civil—compree?*"

"Oh, yes. I onnerstan, all right. You come for mak' de road, huh? De beeg highway?"

"Well—yeah, let it go at that! *Trays beans*, as you fellows say, I guess I'll be getting back to Harrierville, or whatever the name of the neck of the woods is. Say, though, perhaps you can tell me where I can get hold of a young fellow that ain't working? I want to hire a rodman."

"You want hire some fella for do some work, *hein?*"

"Yeah, that's it."

"*Maudit!* I don't know me effe dere's any young

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fella he's know how for do dat kin' work, in dees parish."

"He don't have to know how. I'll tell him what to do, so long's he's got a little common sense. But if you know of one that can speak English, that'll be better."

"By Gar, dere's no young fella can speak de Eenglish, in his parish, but dat Wilbrod Cabochin."

"Where's he live, then?"

"He's live on de village . . . Saint-Epistemon . . . up de road, dere. Jus' h-ask anyone where is live Monsieur Cabochin—but I don' know dat you'll get dat Wilbrod for work for you—he's wan damn lazy fella."

"Well, I'll give him a try, and if he ain't any good, I'll fire him."

"Dat's too bad my son, Hercule, he's not here! He's speak de Eenglish, and he's work hard, too. Dat boy, he's damn smart! He's drive a taxi, in Montreal. You come from Montreal?"

"Yeah." The young man stepped on the starter.

"Perhaps you see dere Hercule, some time? He's drive wan dose taxi wid de white strip on dem—Hercule Begin, hees name," Polycarpe shouted, above the whirring of the engine.

"Well, maybe I did meet him—but I see so many taxi-drivers, I don't just mind him at this moment. So long—" He let in the clutch, and executing a smart turn, was off to Saint-Epistemon.

Polycarpe watched him disappear, and then went into the house to discuss the event in all its aspects

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with Mme. Begin, in default of any more intelligent audience. He explained to her that M. Taschereau, the provincial premier, had given instructions that a highway was to be made through the parish. It was to connect with the Gosford Road near Saint-Epistemon, but whither it was to lead, was vague. Unquestionably, it would be a great thing for the parish, and especially for those farmers whose lands were on the road. Tourists would come in swarms, and there was much money to be made from them—selling eggs and milk, renting them ground to camp on, etc. Polycarpe painted a very rosy picture of prosperity, and proposed to set to work that afternoon to design a large and attractive sign advertising the services which the Maison Begin would render to weary and hungry travellers. Mme. Begin made a reference to the well-known fable of the girl who counted her chickens before they were hatched, and suggested that Polycarpe had better finish the hen-house instead, and leave his sign until they had the road. He ignored this advice, however, and spent a pleasant afternoon, discussing the news with the neighbors, and ended the day by a grand confabulation in the Bedaud store.

Nothing very exciting developed for the next two or three days. The engineer whose name, it appeared, was George Pratt, wandered about the country in his Ford, which he would leave parked in the road, and ramble off across the *terrain*, peering about with field-glasses, and squinting through a sort of miniature telescope. He consulted a small scale map fre-

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quently, made marks on it, and scribbled in a note book. He was constantly under observation by one or another of the natives, and the meaning of his every movement was sagely discussed. It was found strange that he should spend so much time off the road. One or two asked him questions about the new highway, but he returned unsatisfactory answers—pretending that he did not understand the purport of the queries, or giving forth a flood of technical gibberish, that was as useful to them as Parsee would have been. No one had sufficient command of English to interrogate him satisfactorily.

After several days spent in these reconnaissances; with local excitement mounting all the time, Mr. Pratt began operations, with Wilbrod Cabochin and Euphorbe Gagnon as aides. He used a transit, Wilbrod manipulated a rod with mysterious figures and symbols marked all over it, and Euphorbe was allotted the task of cutting pegs and driving them into the ground, where directed. The trio disappeared from Saint-Epistemon in the Ford, early one morning, and nobody could discover where they had gone. Wilbrod and Euphorbe were brought back about dusk, and when questioned, said they had been told by their employer to say nothing about their job to anyone, under pain of dismissal. Needless to mention, this mystery intensified natural curiosity, and more than one of the villagers determined to spend the next day tracking down the survey party.

This proved a not very difficult task—they were discovered about ten o'clock in the morning, working

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from Harrietteville, running a line roughly parallel to the Sixth Range road, some three hundred yards to the south. Various spectators observed their labors, but being able to discover nothing, and failing to comprehend the strange oaths uttered by Mr. Pratt when Wilbrod failed to grasp his instructions or respond to his signals, soon went their way. Early in the afternoon the party arrived on the Begin property, having in the meantime crossed the road. Polycarpe advanced to meet them. Disregarding Wilbrod and Euphorbe, he went to the engineer, who was engaged in centering a transit over the peg last driven.

“’Ullo, ’ow are you, Meester Pratt?” he inquired, genially.

“Hello, yourself!”

Mr. Pratt’s temper was wearing thin. He was keen on finishing his field-work this afternoon and did not relish interruptions. He knew perfectly well what the questions asked would be, and felt an overpowering desire to answer them with outrageous insults. He was hot and tired, and hoarse from shouting at his assistants, both of whom appeared to him congenital idiots. Moreover, going through a swamp earlier in the day, he had been severely bitten by black flies, and there was a nail in his shoe, which while not intolerable enough to cause him to stop and pull it out, constantly obtruded itself upon his consciousness.

“Dat beeg high road, she’s goin’ be right along by here?”

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"Yeah, the higher the fewer."

"Uh? Wat you say?"

"So's your old man."

"*Pardon*—Wat ole man? I say, dat high road, she's come by here, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Mr. Pratt, who had been peering through the transit, straightened up, and observed: "Say, for gossake, cantcha see I'm busy? Think I ain' got anything to do but answer damfool questions all day long? Go and take a jump in the lake!" He bent to his work again.

Polycarpe had not understood his remarks, which had been delivered with great velocity and emphasis, but he perceived that Mr. Pratt was irritated. Tact would be necessary to procure the information he desired.

"She's hot day, by damn," he commented, affably.

A grunt was the only answer. The engineer, who had been setting on the back picket, transited—tried to swing onto Wilbrod's rod, in advance. Polycarpe was standing in the way.

"Outta the daylight, goof!" he commanded, and as no move resulted, gave a violent wave.

Polycarpe comprehended and cleared the line of sight, but unfortunately, Wilbrod interpreted the motion as a signal, and began to move slowly off to the right.

"Sweet sanctified spirits of camphor!" remarked the harassed Pratt. "Wouldja look at that gardam ape, strayin' all over the countryside?" He let out a hoarse yell, and by dint of much waving, Wilbrod

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was shepherded back to his original position. Polycarpe also had edged closer.

"I s'pose you can see pretty damn far troo dat *longue*—troo dose glass, dere?" he remarked, breathing on the young man's neck. Leaning over to observe the action of the compass needle, he lost his balance slightly, and joggled the instrument. Mr. Pratt straightened himself up, a dangerous light in his eye. He took breath, and loosed a torrent of vehement and original profanity.

"Now getta hell outta here," he concluded. "Have-n't I got enough to bother about without every gar-dam peacracker in the county pestering me with blurry fool remarks, and knocking the transit outta plumb? I'm fed up, so lay off, if you don't want a bust in the snoot!"

Polycarpe had only understood about half of the speech, but the more commonplace oaths had told him that he was the recipient of some very artistic abuse. He felt his gorge rise.

"Wat you say, huh?" he spluttered.

"Oh. . . . *Bees mon cou, maudit song père.*" Mr. Pratt mustered up his scanty store of French abuse.

The effect was instantaneous. Polycarpe grew scarlet, ejaculated a few phrases, and meditated an assault upon the person of his insulter. Sizing up Mr. Pratt, who was almost a head taller and of a rugged and bony frame, he abandoned this idea, however, and drawing himself up, majestically delivered:

"Dees my farm, see? You get off! Right away.

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. . . I not want you here. *Va t'en, tout de suite. Espèce de canaille!*"

"Oh, you think so? Well, get this! I'll just run my line across here if I feel like it, and if you don't like it, you can do the other thing. Compree?"

Polycarpe understood sufficiently. He said nothing, but several plans passed through his brain. He might knock over the instrument, but he felt that this would bring reprisals which he did not care to subject himself to. . . . He might go for assistance, but by the time he had collected enough force to deal with the intruder (and it was doubtful whether he could persuade anyone else to participate in his quarrel) the fellow would have passed on. . . . He might get his gun—there would be no argument, there . . . and all the time he glared into the eyes of Mr. Pratt, who returned his glare with composure. Polycarpe turned away, and as he did so, an inspiration came to him. He moved off without a word towards the upper pasture. This Irishman (every non-French-speaking person, except an American, is Irish to the habitant) thought he could insult him on his own land, and escape unharmed, did he? He should see!

Mr. Pratt saw him depart, laughed shortly, then set to releveing his instrument and repeating the observation. He finished his work at that station and went on to the next where he got through without incident, and then proceeded to the last station on the Begin farm. He was in the midst of reading the stadia rod there, when he observed Wilbrod drop it,

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and wave his arms, wildly. He was shouting something, but as the wind was unfavorable, the words were lost.

Mr. Pratt strained his ears, wondering what new madness had afflicted his assistant, when he heard a rumbling bellow behind him. Looking round, he saw an enormous Holstein bull, some forty yards away, head down, tossing earth over his shoulder with his forefoot, and giving vent to blood-curdling roars. The engineer stood paralyzed for an instant, but recovering his wits, seized the transit by the legs, threw it over his shoulder and began to run for the fence. The bull started at the same time. Luckily, there were only some fifty yards to go, and the man scrambled over just in time, aided by a diversion created by Euphorbe Gagnon, who rushed up and flung a huge rock with excellent aim, taking the animal behind the ear and causing him to swerve towards the new enemy. He struck the stout wire fence, and because he was not running at full tilt, the fence held.

But Euphorbe and Mr. Pratt took no chances. They continued their retreat until another field lay between them and the bull, which remained in a very bad temper, flinging clouds of dust skyward and venting its rage in ear-splitting bellows.

Then the three young men observed Polycarpe. He leaned on the fence and smoked his pipe. Mr. Pratt turned the transit on him and discerned a grin of intense satisfaction.

After a short spell of swearing, the engineer set

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himself to consider the problem of proceeding with his survey, estimating the angles and distances from the last two stations. Apparently, he solved it to his satisfaction, for the party continued the work, and in about an hour had finished.

While walking back to the Ford, which had been left a mile or so down the road, Mr. Pratt looked keenly about him to catch sight of M. Begin, but that gentleman, who was observing them from behind a curtained window in the upper story of his house, judged it prudent not to appear.

The next morning, the engineer set off by road from Harrietteville and was no more seen in the vicinity.

M. Wilbrod Cabochin was for a day, a person of considerable importance in the parish, for everyone burned to know what the real purpose of the survey had been. At first, he vowed that as a man of honor he could not betray the secrets of his employer, since the engineer had been very impressive as to the necessity for silence. It was not long, however, before the pressure of flattery and the desire to make a sensation, also the reflection that he had now pocketed his wages, all combined to loose his tongue. Télémache Bedaud was the recipient of his first confidence.

"This is a fact, M. Bedaud," he announced, with tremendous gravity, "that should not be allowed to become known to the people of the parish at large. Believe me, there will be an advantage to be gained

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by a man who knows how to hold his tongue! As for myself, I am not in the *affaires*, so I let you know, trusting that if you should contrive to make something by the aid of the information I shall give you, I—ahem—shall not be forgotten.”

Télémache, cupidity now allied to curiosity, promised that he would not be so ungrateful; adding, sympathetically, that a young man of Wilbrod’s tastes needed more money for the gratification of them than a strict father would supply. ‘Yes . . . yes . . . but certainly . . . he understood the matter!’

A confidential wink promised more than the mere words.

“Well, the fact is— Remember I was not told this by Mr. Pratt, who was very close-mouthed and secretive—I deduced it myself from what we did—the fact is . . . it was not a road which we were laying out, at all . . . but a railway!”

“A railway? But why? How do you know it was a railway?”

“We started work from a point on the Quebec Central, about three miles north of Harrietville. You can come and see the pegs, if you so desire. Then, we went on, by a series of gentle curves, keeping almost on the same level throughout, until we ended up on the farm of Onesiphore Pouget.”

“But . . . why . . . why? Why should anyone want to build a railway to the farm of Onesiphore Pouget? You are quite sure it could not have been a road?”

“Well, I am not expert in these matters, but it

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seemed to me that the line we pegged out resembled the manner in which a railway runs, rather than a road. If M. Pratt had been going to make a road, why should he not have followed the Sixth Range? There are there few hills. . . . As to why anyone should build a railway in that direction—well, there, I do not know any more than you do. But you have a knowledge of affairs—you can make it your business to find out, and then, for your profit—by purchasing land and reselling it to the railway company, for example. I do not need to tell you. . . .”

Télémaque considered this speculation for a moment, then said:

“Well, Wilbrod, I am very much obliged to you—you are a good lad, and in case—I shall not forget you.”

Wilbrod coughed, and inquired somewhat diffidently, whether M. Bedaud would find it convenient to make him a small advance of ten dollars or so on the strength of the valuable information and anticipated fortune. M. Bedaud smiled in an indulgent fashion, and replied:

“*Tiens*, Wilbrod, that is not the way in which business is done! When the transaction is complete, and I find it is successful, why then there will be a little commission for you . . . but in the meantime . . . it is all so doubtful. . . . And remember, my boy, say nothing to anyone else—if you wish to touch your money, at all!”

Télémaque was very good-humored, but Wilbrod, feeling that he could not move him, and regretting

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that he had not exacted the ten dollars before he had given the information, departed, not good-humored at all.

The secret was well kept for several months. A vague rumor of a railway did spread about, but it was merely due to conjecture based on Euphorbe's unintelligent account of his activities. As nothing happened, and people grew tired of repeating Polycarpe's excellent yarn of how he had routed the engineer by the aid of Bull Grand Monarque II, the survey was forgotten.



HE SAID HIS NAME WAS BILSKY

CHAPTER XX: INTELLIGENCE

ONE July day, Polycarpe Begin received an urgent communication from Montreal—from his son, Hercule, in fact. It opened with an obscure paragraph which seemed to hint at a great deal of money to be made in an easy fashion through some intelligence which had, by a remarkable coincidence, come to his, Hercule's, ears. This news was of such an important and secret character, that the writer felt himself unable to trust it to the care of His Majesty's mail. The letter concluded with a request that Polycarpe should send a money order sufficient for railway fare and travelling expenses from Montreal to Harrietteville. A postscript announced that this appeal was necessary, since a collision—due to the other chauffeur's stupidity—had occasioned a difference with his company.

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Polycarpe pondered for several hours before he sent the money. It was probable that Hercule's mysterious information would turn out to be utterly valueless, but the indulgent father suspected from the tone of the communication that his son had found the going pretty hard of late in the metropolis, and would not be unwilling to return to the home-stead for a considerable spell, if not for good. When Polycarpe thought of the milking and the hay crop, he felt that Hercule's assistance would be worth the price of the railway fare, at least. Besides, it would be easy to retain him in Saint-Epistemon, by refusing to advance money to go away, again. . . . And the imbecility of leaving cash around in the house would not a second time be committed!

In three days Hercule arrived. He still looked comparatively spruce, but his worldly goods were contained in a very small fibre suitcase. In spite of the unimpressive manner of his homecoming, he seemed inclined to swagger a little, and to be bursting with impatience to reveal the secret which had been his excuse for returning to the parish.

When Mme. Begin's manifestations of maternal delight were concluded, the two men strolled out into the barnyard. Though Polycarpe's curiosity had been stimulated by Hercule's evident excitement, he restrained his impulse to question the boy, thus protecting himself from immediate coalition in any crack-brained scheme his son might propose. But Hercule was not averse to opening the subject, so, after a few commonplaces about the state of the crops

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and some minor changes in the farm stock, he came to the business that had brought him to Saint-Epistemon once more.

"This is something altogether strange, *son père*, and you will open your eyes with astonishment before I have finished telling you. It came about like this—now, please attend. . . . One evening, a man hailed me just when I was driving my taxi out of the garage. First, he commanded me to drive him to a place on Mount Royal Boulevard. There, it seemed that the person he expected to visit, was not at home. I should say that this man—a Jew—was more than a little drunk. He was very angry when he found this person was out. . . . I guess it was some girl he wanted to see . . . and then he told me to drive to a road-house, out towards Cartierville. When we got there, he invited me to come and have a glass with him. That is against the rules, but I was not likely to be found out, so I accepted. Often that happens, when the patrons get well drunk, they become exceedingly friendly.

"Well, I went in with him, and we had several glasses. . . . He insisted, you understand, and it is never wise to antagonize a good customer. You should have seen his roll of bills, my father . . . like that!" Hercule indicated with his hands an object about the size of a watermelon.

"Well?" questioned the father, "what would you have—that you waylay this money-stuffed Israelite, and murder him in cold blood?"

"Have patience, *son père*, and do not, I pray,

start to ridicule my plan before it is fully known to you. As I was saying . . . he confided to me—as heavy drinkers will—his success in large *affaires*. He was in the employ of some rich man, who dealt in stocks and got up companies and so on. Much of his talk I did not understand, but after long tales of money he had made in this way and that—he was getting drunker and more outspoken all the time—he began to talk of a company his boss had shares in, which was for mining the asbestos. Now, that was something interesting to me, for the mines at Thetford are not far from this parish and there is said to be asbestos all through this county. But I gave no sign, and listened more attentively.”

“Did he say who this rich man was, his boss?” queried Polycarpe.

“No. That was something he kept to himself, but he said that his boss was a big man in the *Compagnie d'Asbestos de Québec*.”

“*Vraiment!* But that is one of the biggest companies there is! Jean-Baptiste Larivière worked for that company—two, maybe three, years ago.”

“Sure! I know! Well, he talked on, giving me to understand that their stock was going to make a big jump. I paid little heed to this, knowing nothing of such matters, except that the *curé* preached a sermon against those who gamble on the stock exchange and rob the poor men who do the labor. So I was not going to allow myself to be led astray by his big talk of money to be made easily in that sinful fashion. I asked him why the stock was going up, and—here

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comes the part which nearly made me swallow my glass—he said their company was going to acquire new properties on which they would start mines far bigger and richer than those at Thetford!”

“I see nothing of a breath-taking nature in that,” muttered Polycarpe.

“No? Well, listen further—I trembled with fear that he would say no more, but he went on, and said everything was ready except that the land had not been bought—it seemed that they could not do that until they had some law business completed, but they had made a survey of a railway, and prepared all their plans to start right to work. Looking at me like an owl, he made me swear to tell nobody of what he was going to reveal—saying he only told me because I was a good fellow, and he wanted me to make some money for myself on the stock exchange, being too intelligent a type to spend my life driving a taxi . . . which, you must admit, *son père*, contains a grain of truth! He started to cry then, but I quieted him down, and asked him where these new properties were supposed to be. Judge of my sensations when he replied, ‘In Dudswell Township—do you know where that is?’ I said I did not, and he went on to say that it was near a place on the Q. C. Railway, called Harrierville——”

At this, Polycarpe, unable to contain himself, rapped out: “*Ba’tême!* It was for *that* that the *maudit* Pratt was prowling round here. . . .”

“What? What did you say?”

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"Never mind. I'll tell you after—go on with your story."

"In fine, the place for the mine was on the farm of a man named Poulet. . . . Figure to yourself there is no Poulet in this parish . . . he must mean Onesiphore Pouget!"

"*Torrieu!* What happened then, *Hercule?*"

"Oh, he went on to say that the good asbestos was all on that farm, and that no other would do them . . . for some reason that the mining would be too difficult if they had to start somewhere else. Then, as he was getting so drunk that it was not possible to understand what he was saying, I told him he had better get back to his home. He wept more then, so I picked him up and took him to the taxi. He said his name was Irving Bilsky, and he lived at the St. James' Hotel. So I took him there——"

"Well?"

"Next day I had the accident with my taxi—it was not my fault, but they said they would not employ me any more— So I wrote to you——"

"You did well! Asbestos on Onesiphore's farm? But I remember now, on the hill back in the woods, Onesiphore showed me, years ago, what he called rocks with the whiskers—big pieces of rock with threads like cotton hanging from them. You could pick them apart with your fingers. It was a curious thing, but I thought no more of it. By damn, it is all true, sure enough!"

"Above all, Onesiphore—wherever the old fox may

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be—must not get to know . . . if he did, it would be impossible for us to buy the farm from him——”

The two continued the debate, on and off, for the rest of the evening, and were still planning when they retired at ten o'clock. Zenobie, kept in ignorance of what the whispering portended, was driven nearly mad with curiosity—curiosity still further whetted by the fragmentary phrases uttered by Polycarpe, as he dozed fitfully during the night. She knew that money and Onesiphore Pouget were involved, and came to the conclusion that Onesiphore had buried a large treasure somewhere, and that her husband and son were going to dig it up. When she taxed them next day with this project, she drew down on herself the lightnings of Polycarpe's wrath, and was bidden, under pain of the most dreadful penalties, to say nothing to anyone of the mystery which would be explained to her in good time.

It was regretfully concluded that a partner to the scheme was necessary, since Polycarpe had not the required capital. They calculated that two thousand dollars would be a tempting price for the Pouget farm, which was for the most part poor, rocky land. They laughed to themselves when they thought of how valuable those seemingly useless rocks would become!

But if they could offer Mme. Pouget two thousand dollars cash, representing that Polycarpe wished to acquire more grazing land—he would say he was going to have a larger herd—pointing out to her that the farm was too large for her and Ma-

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thilde to manage and that she would do better to take a small house and plot near the village—there was little doubt that she would joyfully accept.

Télémache Bedaud was selected as the man most likely to have the necessary capital, one who also was experienced in *affaires*, and who would be able to give sound advice, if needed. A conference was held that day between him and the two Begins. When Hercule's story had been repeated, he divulged the information which he had received about the survey from Wilbrod Cabochin. Everything fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle—they marvelled at the train of chances which had opened for them this unparalleled opportunity to grow wealthy without exertion, and without risk. "Why, the farm is worth nearly two thousand dollars, cash, as it stands!" exclaimed Polycarpe.

"It will be worth fifty times two thousand dollars for the purpose to which it is going to be put!" observed Télémache.

Expedition was necessary. The money was available, and M. Begin lost no time in starting negotiations. His friendly relations with Mme. Pouget stood him in good stead. He opened his attack by expressing profuse sympathy with her hard lot, the labor, which all the time became more trying . . . and the worrying uncertainty about Onesiphore's fate. Then, he submitted his proposition . . . omitting to mention a price.

Here, an unexpected and apparently unsurmountable obstacle came to light. Mme. Pouget said readily

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enough that she would be glad to sell the farm, and had some weeks ago been on the point of offering it for sale, but that the notary had told her she had lacked the right to sell; that Onesiphore was the owner, although he could not dispose of it without *her* consent. But so long as his death remained unproven, no title that she could grant to the land would be valid. Hence, none would pay her money for the property when Onesiphore might come back any day, denounce the transaction, and occupy the farm. So she had given up all thought of selling until some proof of her husband's death should be secured—or until the seven years necessary to establish death by presumption should have elapsed.

This check threw the speculators into the depths of despair. They debated endlessly, where Onesiphore might have got to. They inserted advertisements in the newspapers; Télémache made trips to Sherbrooke and Thetford Mines, and questioned the police in both places without result. Polycarpe and Hercule spent every spare hour tramping through the woods, hoping to find their neighbor's body, but though they searched nearly every acre of woodland in the county, they found not the least trace. They thought of offering a reward for information concerning his whereabouts, but after much discussion, decided this course was sure to lead to suspicion. During the delay, they were in agonies of apprehension lest the emissaries of the Asbestos Company should approach Mme. Pouget and make her an offer for the land, pending Onesiphore's return. Once this com-

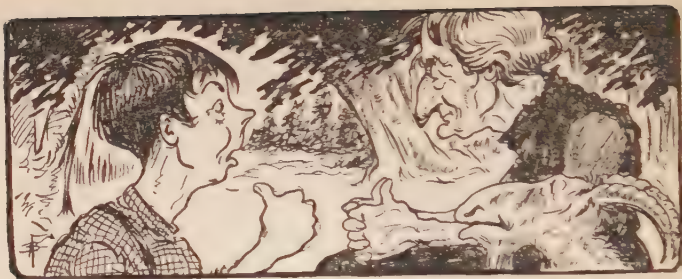
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petition entered, all would be lost to them. Their scanty resources could not match the bid of the corporation which, in the minds of these rural speculators, was all-powerful, and could easily override the barriers of conveyance, snatching the prize from out of their very fingers.

Occasionally, during the long watches of the night, Polycarpe's conscience would trouble him. Was he not contravening his duty to his neighbor? Was he not conspiring to defraud a widow and an orphan? But, in the daytime, he silenced the still small voice, arguing that they would be no better off if the Asbestos Company bought the land—paying them no more than they were obliged to. Also, when the transaction was complete, and he and Télémache were wealthy, they could make restitution. After all, business was business, and things like that were done every day by the great financiers who were looked up to and envied by everybody in the country.

Under the strain, the furrows deepened in Polycarpe's brow; his rubicund complexion became several shades paler, and his temper grew frightful. Télémache, more stolid and self-contained, sank into resignation, declaring gloomily that they would never grasp the fortune.

The summer wore on. Between the three conspirators and wealth stood the grim ghost of Onesiphore—an entity that could neither manifest itself in life . . . nor decently and indubitably die!



LIVED WITH HIS GOAT IN A CAVE

CHAPTER XXI: HERMIT

THE largest flat-bottomed rowboat of the Hotel Patelin crept sluggishly across the northern end of Lake Wamphamagog. Its slow progress was due to two factors; first, it was freighted with three ladies whose combined weight of 420 pounds concentrated towards the stern caused it to be submerged within an inch of the gunwale; second, the motive power was furnished by one Démosthène Prunier, a lad of fourteen years, who, though precocious in other directions, was not remarkable for physical strength—or a desperate fondness for hard labor. However, he grunted convincingly over the reluctant oars, and the ladies were very sorry for him and determined upon a suitable reward at the conclusion of the journey. Meanwhile, they wished that M. Patelin had provided them with a motor boat, or at least, a

lustier oarsman, for they were extremely anxious to arrive at their destination.

Mrs. Wellington Roscoe, Miss Dalrymple, and Miss Evangeline Pornick, the first guests of the hotel, were indefatigable seekers after those pleasures that make life intolerable. They explored and picnicked with grim industry, but after a fortnight's stay at the hotel, M. Patelin could not help noticing a waning in their enthusiasm. In fact, they told him frankly, that he must suggest new worlds to conquer if their patronage was desired for a more protracted period. Deep in his heart, M. Patelin found no blame for them. Pity, perhaps, but not censure. M. Patelin marvelled that they had been so long content to ramble—objectless—through the woods, press wild flowers, ascend rocky hills from whose summit nothing could be seen, and take snap-shots of abandoned lumber shanties. So he was sincerely pleased to be able to indicate a romantic and mysterious adventure—in short, a hermit's cave.

He smiled benignly at their enthusiastic reaction to his proposal, and returned vague answers to their requests for particulars of the recluse's mode of life. Osias hinted that he, and all the countryside, stood greatly in awe of the shadowy personage, and all were content to leave him alone. In fine, he could not withhold from them that the mystic's supernatural powers might be maleficent, as well as benign.

But they declared their willingness to take all risks, and twittering with excitement the trio set off this morning.

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Young Démosthène, though he deprecated the physical labor which his mission imposed, was none the less filled with importance at being selected by M. Patelin for the enviable position of guide to the Hermitage, and interpreter for the conferences which would take place there. He, himself, did not hold the hermit in awe, but he took care to pretend to the first clients—as he had been pretending to the rest of the hotel staff—that he was filled with the deepest reverence, not to say fear, when he approached the lower end of the lake where the old man's retreat lay.

"You say this hermit lives in a cave, all by himself?" inquired Mrs. Wellington Roscoe.

"*Oui—*" grinned Démosthène, "*avec sa chèvre.* Wid hees goat, you know."

"And he is possessed of supernatural powers?" asked Miss Evangeline Pornick, an elongated neutral-tinted person, who was recuperating after her labors of teaching the Sixth Grade of the Pottstown Collegiate.

"Sure, madame! By damn, he's eat the hat of M'sieu Patelin!"

"But how interesting!" cooed Miss Dalrymple, who was plump and not un-beautiful, in a Flour-and-Feed-Calendar sort of way.

"The hermit ate Mr. Patelin's hat?" Mrs. Roscoe's voice rose, incredulously.

Démosthène laughed gaily. "*Non,*" he explained. "Dat's de goat. De odder fella, she's eat de berries, de root, an' sometimes, maybe, she's catch a feesh from de *lac.*" Part of M. Patelin's instructions had

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been recited with satisfaction. Démosthène was pleased to have suffered, so far, no lapse of memory.

"But how interesting!" observed Miss Dalrymple.

Démosthène pondered over his next speech. He must get it clear in his head—M. Patelin had made it plain to him that grave penalties would result if he made any mistakes in detailing the history of the hermit.

"Dat ole fella," he continued, "he's pray all de night, an' mos' of de day. . . . Begosh, he's holy lak hell!"

The ladies, unfamiliar with the habitant superlative, were slightly disappointed at the hypocrisy that seemed to be implied.

"Is he very old?" inquired Miss Pornick. Since Osias had mentioned the word "hermit," she had been visualizing a sombre-eyed ascetic, who could peer into the darkest recesses of the soul—a psychic whose gaze could transport believers to a plane of ineffable harmony.

"Oh, yas," responded Démosthène. "He's got wan hondred year, maybe."

Miss Dalrymple considered this to be very interesting also. Miss Pornick, on the other hand, experienced a stab of disillusionment. She had pictured this concentration of wisdom in a youthful form, romantically swart, architecturally symmetrical. But she hid her feelings and returned to her question.

"But he is very wise, too, isn't he? He can tell what is going to happen? Is that so, little boy?"

"Sure—he can, eef he's lak to! He's tell Madame

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Fafard she's goin' to have de twin, an' by damn, seven mont' after, she's have de twin, ollright!"

Mrs. Roscoe observed, drily, that auguries of such a character would scarcely gratify the party en route. . . . and even Miss Dalrymple failed to find the subject interesting. Démosthène, feeling that this part of his story had not been received with very much enthusiasm, subsided until they reached the little cove near where the hermit had his abode.

When the boat's nose touched the shore, he disembarked and helped the women to clamber out, advising them that he would go to the cave and find out whether the seer would consent to receive them. They were on no account to move from the beach.

He scrambled up a steep and winding path that disappeared in the woods. In a few minutes, he returned with the news that the hermit had graciously signified his willingness to grant them an audience. They were however, to approach one at a time. This stipulation caused a slight uneasiness, and the ladies discussed the advisability of going on. Démosthène gathered at length what the argument was about, and interrupted:

"*Maudit*, dere's no reason for be scare'! He's old man—*très faible*! I'm wid you all de time!"

Thus reassured, Mrs. Wellington Roscoe announced that she would be the first to make the experiment. She followed the agile Démosthène up the path, and in about a minute arrived somewhat breathless, on a small plateau which had been partially cleared of brush and trees. A cliff, some thirty

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feet in height, faced her. Directly in front was a cranny, a fissure in the solid granite face, which widened at the base and combined with an overhang at one side to form what might be described as a cave, although the thought flashed through her mind that it would not provide a very efficient shelter against the weather if the wind was in the west. However, her attention was soon monopolized by the cave's occupant, a being whose strange aspect fulfilled the anticipations of weirdness and unworldliness she had entertained.

The hermit was seated on a rock, apparently engrossed in a volume which he held on his knee. A wide-brimmed straw hat, of the sort commonly affected by farmers and popularly known as a "cow's breakfast," surmounted shaggy locks. The old man's huge and bony frame was shrouded in a shapeless garment of coarse, dirty-white cotton, whose general looseness and design suggested a mother-hubbard. A length of rope belted up his middle. The robe being innocent of sleeves called immediate attention to a pair of sinewy, brown arms; and being fashionably short, to two hairy, knotty calves. Mrs. Roscoe noted with some disappointment, that his feet were encased in cowhide moccasins of the ordinary *habitant* pattern, and felt that sandals would have been more appropriate. But the most striking feature was the profuse and noble beard—a truly patriarchal hirsute adornment. Mrs. Roscoe thought of Count Tolstoi, of Moses, and then of Santa Claus. But this recluse had nothing of the jovial rotundity of the

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good St. Nicholas. A huge and high-bridged nose, flanked by prominent cheekbones, dominated the face until he lifted his head and unmasked deep-set, piercing black eyes beneath shaggy, mephistophelean eyebrows. Mrs. Roscoe thought of Bernard Shaw, and a gasp of admiration escaped her.

The hermit rose, and without a word stalked to the back of the cave, deposited his book and returned, coming to a standstill by his seat, his hands joined together over his stomach in the attitude of meditation. Mrs. Roscoe had noted while he walked away from her that the back of his robe bore a remarkable pattern in red and blue—a sort of circlet about the word “purity”, in Gothic letters. The explanation of this apposite inscription came to her suddenly. . . . the old man’s dress was confected of flour bags. It was a slight shock to her æsthetic instincts, but she reminded herself that it was really a proof of genuineness—a too-appropriately dressed hermit would have been suspect, at once.

She started. The hermit had spoken—an abrupt sentence, delivered in French, in a booming and resonant voice to Démosthène, who stood a little distance behind her.

“How long is this old cow going to stare at me?” was in fact, what the old man had asked.

Démosthène giggled.

“What does he say?” inquired Mrs. Roscoe.

“He’s say—oh, I don’ know de English. . . . He’s kin’ of mak’ de blessing, I guess.”

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Mrs. Roscoe was gratified, and told Démosthène to express her thanks for the benediction.

"What does she say?" from the hermit.

"Nothing. M. Patelin said she would ask questions which you would answer. She has not asked any yet. But you have made an impression on her."

"I can see that. Tell me, do all the women at the hotel attire themselves in pantaloons in that fashion?"

"No—only the fattest of them. From behind, she looks like a haystack with a tarpaulin over it, does she not?"

"Precisely! And her face. . . . like a pie that has not been sufficiently cooked."

"What does he say?" Mrs. Roscoe was becoming curious.

"Oh. . . ." Démosthène recollected his lesson again. "He's tell me about the dream—not a dream, but somethin' like a dream wat de holy man 'ave. . . ."

"A vision?"

"*Oui*—a veesion." Démosthène went on rapidly in French, to the hermit: "M. Patelin said you would tell a tale of what you had seen in a dream. Tell me, and I will tell her."

The recluse stroked his beard, blinked at the sky, and began a narrative, punctuated by appropriate gestures, and interrupted every now and then to allow for translation. Démosthène's version went as follows:

"He's dream he's stand on a beeg, high mountain—high like anyt'ing. De win she's blow, an' he's cold, an' he's hongry, also—he's not have notting for eat

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for long time—maybe t'ree weeks! Bagosh, he's hongry! Den, all at wance, dere come along in a kin' of cart dat's fly in de air, a pretty girl. *Maudit!* she's pretty like anyt'ing, and she's—wat you call—*absolument nue*—she's not have notting on, not even her *chemise de nuit!*"

Mrs. Roscoe coughed in a deprecating manner. She trusted that the vision would soon become more seemly—from her slight reading on the subject, she remembered that hermits were apt to be plagued by hallucinations of sad lubricity. Démosthène went on:

"She's reach down on the floor of de cart, and she's bring up a fur coat, made from de real buffalo. 'Ere,' she says, 'You 'ave cold, take dis.' But somet'ing is tell him not take it. He not say notting. De girl, she look kin' of mad, but she's reach down on de floor of de cart again, and she's bring up a beeg roast turkey, dat's smell fine, by damn! 'Ere,' she say, 'You 'ave hunger, take dis and eat him.' But again, somet'ing tell him not take dat turkey. Den de girl, she's look pretty damn mad, but after a while she's start to smile, and she's step out of de cart—he say de cart was pull by a bunch of great beeg black heagles—she's step out of de cart, and she's still got notting on at all, and by damn, but she looks swell!

"She's go right up to him and put her arms roun' his neck, and she say she's love him, and bagosh, he's wan fine beeg man, and all dat kin' stuff lak de girls say all de time w'en dey make love, you know."

Mrs. Roscoe bridled somewhat, and was about to

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disclaim knowledge of any such Circean practices, when the youth continued:

“All at wance, somet’ing tell him wat he mus’ do, an’ he shake her arms off, and stan’ back and make de sign—of de cross. Bagosh, dat pretty girl, den she’s change into de devil, *tout de suite!* An’ he’s mad lak hell, because he’s not fool de old man. De old man, he’s only laugh, for the devil don’t scare him—*pas du tout!* He’s turn about, an’ walk away to de hedge of de cleef, dere, but de devil, he sneak up behin’ him an’ he hit him wan beeg kick in de . . . *pardon, madame*, dat’s not nice word, but anyway, you know de place, an’ de old man, he’s fin’ himself flyin’ troo de hair, an’ he’s gonna fall on de hard rocks, way down at de foot of de mountain!

“But den, wat ’appen? W’y two, maybe t’ree hangels dey come flyin’ hup, and dey grab him by de shirt, and dey hold him hup, and fly down along and set him on de ground, gentle, and de hangels tell him he has done de good hact, and dat *le bon Dieu* ees ver’ much please’. Dat’s hall!”

Mrs. Roscoe could only gape at the hermit. Now that the tale was finished—on a highly-exalted note and in violent contrast to the conclusion she had anticipated—there was no reason to restrain her satisfaction.

“Well, isn’t that marvelous?” she pronounced, at last. “It’s like something out of the Bible!”

Démosthène, who was unfamiliar with the book of Holy Writ, showed a shrewdness in advance of his years by holding his tongue. Neither did the hermit

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speaking, but continued to stroke his beard, smiling in a gentle and saintly fashion. His contemplative attitude was disturbed while he destroyed a mosquito that was making inroads on his leg, after which, he addressed a question to the interpreter.

"De old fella say, is dere anyt'ing you want for ask him—maybe he can tell you."

Mrs. Roscoe coughed.

"Well," she said, diffidently, "there *is* something I would very much like to know, but I don't suppose he could answer my question. It is about a person very close to me. . . . Ask him if he thinks he could answer a question about—a relative, say."

Démosthène held a brief colloquy with the hermit, and then announced:

"He say he t'ink so, but you onnerstan', when he answer de question, he's expec' you pay him some-t'ing. 'E don' want de money for himself," he went on, hastily, "it's *pour la charité*. 'E's give de money to de poor, after."

"How much?" queried Mrs. Roscoe.

"Two dollaire."

Mrs. Roscoe fished in her pocket, took out a vanity case, and extracted therefrom two bills which she handed to Démosthène. The youth reluctantly transferred them to the holy and charitable man.

"Wat ces it you want for know?"

"Well—it's something about—about my husband."

"*Elle veut savoir quelque chose à propos de son mari*," translated Démosthène.

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The hermit nodded. He seemed to have known all along.

"I want to know what he's doing while I'm away. . . . In fact, I want to know if he's faithful to me!" The last sentence came out with a rush.

"Elle veut savoir s'il lui est encore fidèle—Maudit! je gage que non, quand je la regarde."

The hermit's features underwent a strange convulsion. He turned his back and coughed violently. The spasm having passed off, he regarded once more the seeker for occult information. He stared at her, intently, approached a pace and laid his hand upon her forehead. Then he withdrew, and seemed to meditate. Finally, he pronounced a few words.

"De old man, he's say dat your *mari*, well, he's kin' of make de flirt, but he's not doin' notting real dirty—not yet!"

"Aah!" Mrs. Roscoe drew in her breath sharply. "Can he say what the woman is like that he's flirting with?"

Démosthène translated, and after a pause, the hermit replied.

"He's say dat he can't see very good, but she's young and pretty."

"Oh. . . . Has she got black hair, and brown eyes?"

The usual translation and reply followed.

"*Oui*, dat's wat she looks like. De old man, he say your 'usban', he's *très épris*,—he stuck on her, lak hell!"

"The brute! As soon as I turn my back! And he

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swore to me he wouldn't go near that barber shop! The underbred little hussy! What men see in these manicurists . . ."

"*Comment, madame? Wat you say?*"

"Never mind! That's all! I want to go back to the hotel."

Mrs. Wellington Roscoe turned, and descended the path at breakneck speed. When Démosthène reached the beach, there was in progress an acrimonious argument among the three women. Mrs. Roscoe was in favor of returning to the hotel at once, averring that the hermit was not particularly interesting, while Miss Dalrymple and Miss Pornick were united in the determination to see him, interesting or not. In the end, Mrs. Roscoe had to sit in the boat, fuming, while both of the others held conferences which seemed to her interminable. Osias never found out why she quitted his hotel so suddenly, but Mr. Wellington Roscoe, to this day, has a firm belief in the occult powers of recluses who pray and fast in the wilderness.

If the hermit had lost a guest for M. Patelin, he managed to arrange that two others lingered for a period considerably longer than had been planned. The conclusion of his interview with Miss Pornick will explain how this came about.

The question and answer stage had been reached, and the enraptured spinster, who could not take her eyes from the somewhat embarrassed hermit, demanded:

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“Does he think that celibacy invests the spirit with a mysterious grace, and facilitates communion with the infinite?”

Démosthène scratched his head and asked for a repetition. Miss Pornick varied the terms slightly, but still they eluded the interpreter's comprehension. Eventually, she asked:

“Does he think it is a good thing not to be married?”

The hermit gave it as his opinion that that depended upon the subject. Personally, he found it most restful.

“Well—does he not think that a woman may live a happy and useful life, even if she avoids marriage?”

The hermit observed that the calendar was full of female celibate saints. His piercing eye caught a flicker of disappointment as Miss Pornick received this intelligence, and he went on, per Démosthène:

“But he's say he t'ink you'd make better a good wife for some nice young fella, dan to be de *religieuse*—de nun.”

Miss Pornick blushed.

“Why?”

“He's say he know.” The hermit added something.

Démosthène continued: “He's say dat you're gonna get *fiancée*, pretty soon—you don' know dat, but all de same, dat so! He say de young man find you 'ere—maybe in two week', maybe in two month'. But, he's gonna come to de hotel, and meet you dere, and he's gonna love you lak hell. . . . He's good looking young fella, wit de blond hairs, and de

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blue heyes . . . an' he's reech . . . lak ole man Patelin!"

Miss Pornick would have liked further information, but the hermit seated himself on his rock again, and recommenced his reading, only vouchsafing an indifferent nod in acknowledgment of her effusive thanks.

When later, Miss Dalrymple made her way down to the boat, the interpreter and the hermit held a brief conversation. "Well, that's not bad! You got seven dollars from those old girls."

"The money was earned. Seldom have I seen such ugly women. The last one was not so revolting, though more imbecile than the other two, if possible."

"She is heavy, just the same," sighed Démosthène. "I shall tell M. Patelin, that in future it will be necessary to bring one at a time."

He laughed.

"What have you, young baggage?" queried the old man.

"They were afraid of you," sniggered the boy—"they—even with such faces! But how could you tell them both the same thing—that they would become engaged in two or three months, at the hotel?"

"I am not so stupid as to have told them the identical fortune. I gave one a fiancé with blond hairs and blue eyes, and the other a man with brown eyes and hairs that were black. I suppose," he mused, aloud, "that I might have made one fat and one thin . . . one short and the other tall—I might indeed

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have made one a blackamoor, and the other a black Protestant—”

“*Dis donc, monsieur,*” interrupted Démosthène, “I ask for a dollar! Without me, you could not have talked to them.”

The hermit raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

“A dollar? What does a boy like you want with a dollar? I never saw a dollar—or very seldom—when I was your age. Besides, those women will no doubt give you something, when you return to the hotel. Look exhausted, and acquire a sudden pain in your heart, or sickness in your stomach. Rob them, my boy, don’t whine at me!”

Démosthène muttered that he preferred to have his commission now, but received only a raucous and derisive laugh as answer.

“Very well then, *Onesiphore,*” he said, angrily. “See if I bring you any more pies from the kitchen, or other good things to eat, as I have done for the past two weeks!”

“Impertinence!” shouted the hermit, in fury. “Young insolence! How dare you? Where is your respect for your elders? Remember, henceforth, to address me as Monsieur Onesiphore Pouget—er—that is—”

Too late he realized that he had betrayed a fact that, above all others, he had wished to keep secret. How Démosthène had learned his identity, Onesiphore did not inquire. Probably, the old gas-bag, Patelin! It was necessary, however, to intimidate the imp and swear him to silence.

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To this end, the hermit advanced with a great show of righteous indignation. But Démosthène was agile. Like a mountain goat he scrambled down the path, nor paused until assured of security from pursuit. Then, he looked back, extended a red tongue at the hermit and thumbed his nose.



NOTHING MORE DELECTABLE THAN A PLUNGE

CHAPTER XXII: HARDSHIPS

THE profession of hermit, reflected Onesiphore sadly, as he listened to the steady drip of rain on the roof of his shack, had many drawbacks. It was strange that he had not thought of them when Osias Patelin proposed this occupation to him—but the hotel-keeper had been so glib about the joys of solitude—especially for a reflective and sensitive spirit battered by crude contact with coarser organisms . . . the life of ease, the opportunity for impressive play-acting when the awed female guests of the hotel would come to gape at him and humbly consult him in the capacity of seer and mystic. . . . well, all Onesiphore wished was that Osias would only come and enjoy some of the pleasures he had described. Osias himself, though urgently summoned many times of late, never came—professing to be

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very busy with the running of the hotel. This was not quite true . . . as a matter of fact he had become disinclined to visit the hermit, who had turned very cranky, made impossible demands for delicacies, all sorts of books, and had even wanted a phonograph and pictures for the walls. It was plain that Onesiphore had not the proper hermitting spirit.

The unfortunate Démosthène, who had to bring the old man his provisions, came in for most of the abuse which should by rights have been visited on the head of Osias. Often, he was entrusted with messages, couched in the most insulting terms, which he wisely modified before repeating to the proprietor. Not a few times, he received cuffs about the ears, and stern lectures on his appearance and manners, with bitter animadversions on his parents' lack of control over their procreative passion. Démosthène supported these trials stoically—he was not at all intimidated by the old man, and used when beyond reach, to return his insults in a way that showed a precocious invention.

It was one of Onesiphore's trials that Osias' imagination in the matter of food, did not rise above potatoes, fat pork alternating with stringy and salt bacon, canned pork and beans, onions, and an occasional cabbage. Canned apples and pears were provided by way of dessert, with once in a long while, a pie from the *cuisine* of the hotel. This menu would not have been intolerable if Onesiphore had possessed even moderate culinary skill, but he was forever burning his meals, or else turning them out half-

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cooked. He suffered now and then from indigestion. So did the goat, if facial expression meant anything.

The goat was another grievance. Before adopting his present occupation, Onesiphore had been indifferent to goats, except for considering them picturesque animals that fitted in well with wild and rugged scenery and were the natural companions of poor and lonely men—such as Robinson Crusoe, *par exemple*. Since living in close contact with one for two months or so, he had become possessed of the deepest loathing for the caprine species. He had christened the goat Beausoleil, by reason of a fancied resemblance to the eminent Senator who resided in Harrierville when he was not in Ottawa, drawing a comfortable remuneration for dozing in the Red Chamber. He used to converse with the animal, at first, by way of practice, but soon abandoned the habit. He found that the glare of the beast's yellow orbs, soulless, yet sinister—made him self-conscious. His active dislike, however, dated from the occasion, when returning from a boresome session at the grotto with some particularly idiotic and uninteresting elderly woman, he had discovered Beausoleil browsing on his best black trousers, which, as they appeared to be getting a little mouldy, he had hung out to air.

Friendly relations ceased from that instant, but Beausoleil, being a creature with no proper pride, was forever attempting to insinuate himself into the hut, in spite of the blows from boots, billets of wood, and other impedimenta which always greeted these efforts. Then his aroma—Onesiphore had not a par-

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ticularly sensitive nose, but Beausoleil's effluvium was altogether too much for him! His presence to windward at a closer range than twenty-five yards, was not to be borne, and in a confined space—*pfui!*

A closely allied discomfort was the family of skunks that had taken up residence somewhere in the vicinity, attracted by the refuse of food, and old cans strewn around the shack. One of these animals had walked in the door, when Onesiphore had opened it on account of the heat, and for an hour or more, the hermit had lain in bed, perspiring freely, but not daring to move to drive the intruder out, for fear that the hut would be rendered uninhabitable for days. After that, the door was kept close shut, but every night there could be heard the scratching and rooting outside, and a skunk, even when not in active eruption, is no perambulating rose-bush. Onesiphore had demanded a rifle, traps, and poison to exterminate them, but Osias (who suspected privately that these lethal agencies were designed for Beausoleil) would not provide them, and irritated the old man with patently untruthful excuses.

Proprietor Patelin, on the last occasion that he had come down to see the hermit, had been tactless enough to remark that it was extraordinary how the hermit and his animal companion were coming to resemble one another. This ridiculous but pertinent observation threw Onesiphore into a paroxysm of fury, which tended to renew itself every time he looked at the wretched beast. However, there had been a slight consolation that day, for Beausoleil had devoured

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M. Patelin's new straw hat, for which he had recently paid two dollars and a half.

Another very tiresome circumstance was that Osias, who had promised to supply a plentiful stock of reading matter had lamentably fallen down in this article of his contract, also. A long and dreary history of some obscure saint by a clerical author . . . a yellow-backed romance, unfortunately lacking the last twenty pages in which the terrible tangle contrived by the author was finally unravelled . . . and a volume of Bossuet's funeral orations, were all the French texts which had been furnished. Several copies of illustrated American magazines (of the type purporting to contain stories of true personal experiences) had also been sent by the thrifty Patelin. Onesiphore looked at the pictures and found them remarkably provocative. Unhappily, his pleasure was tempered with irritation, for the spicy captions relating to the photographs were unintelligible to one lacking a knowledge of English. There was nobody to tell him how lucky he was, in this case! The book of funeral orations was the only one he could bear to read more than once. The florid style pleased him, though the subject was somewhat melancholy and did nothing to improve his spirits. However, he devoted considerable time and pains to the composition of a valedictory to be delivered over the corpse of M. Osias Patelin. This would have been a notable addition to the literature of comminations and black masses, if it had ever been transcribed.

All these seeming neglects on the part of Osias

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were not the result of mere procrastination and carelessness. As a matter of fact, he felt that the hermit had just about outlived his usefulness. The arrangement had been that Onesiphore, besides his food, would receive thirty dollars a month, payable at the close of the season. He had agreed to stay from July until the end of September. But if he could be driven to desperation by the accumulation of discomforts to break his contract, Osias would have grounds for refusing to pay him—or at any rate, in full. Exploiting a hermit was not the cheap attraction he had anticipated. The old man pocketed the offerings of believers who had questions solved by him. There was nothing in it for Osias, himself, the instigator of the idea! Actually, the venture was an expense. Food for those two goats was no inconsiderable item; Démosthène's salary had to be paid, and the lad's time was almost as fully occupied in transporting provisions to the hermitage, as in guiding parties. Furthermore, there was always the worry that Onesiphore would burst out and do some outrageous act, which would bring scandal to the hotel and frighten the guests away. Osias felt that he would be very glad to be rid of him. But he would not pay the old man off, and pack him away, secretly.

He damned the kind-hearted impulse that had led him to offer this strange employment to Onesiphore. He had met him by chance, one day in early June, in a Montreal street. M. Pouget had endeavored to avoid recognition, but Osias, full of curiosity, would not be shaken off. At his urgent solicitation, the long-

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lost-one had accompanied him to a tavern, where they had discussed his affairs over several glasses of beer. Onesiphore was somewhat despondent. He said he had been in Montreal since leaving his home, the previous fall, and had found a pleasant enough billet as a night-watchman. (In point of fact, Herménégilde, his nephew, had secured it for him.) But now, he was weary of the city, and longed for familiar scenes again. Osias urged him to return to Zéphyrine and his farm, where he would be welcomed and all old scores forgotten. Onesiphore refused to consider this, declaring he would never go back, unless he found the means of returning in a triumphant rôle. What such a rôle would be, or how he could achieve fame, or whom he was to triumph over, did not appear. But his mind was made up—he would not go back as a prodigal husband.

Nevertheless, he wished to spend the summer down in the Eastern Townships—not so near Saint-Epistemon that there was any chance of his presence becoming known. What he had in mind was to take up his abode, preferably on the shore of some pleasant lake, in a lumberman's abandoned hut, of which there were plenty. He had saved enough money to enable him to fit up such a cabin with the few utensils he would require, and also to provide food. He would lead a solitary, idle and care-free existence, during the pleasant warm months. All his life, he observed, summer had been the season of toil, and now he was minded to enjoy a holiday. Did Osias recall *le vieux Maturin*, who had lived many years on the shore of

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Lake St. Francis, miles away from anybody?—a species of hermit? He was reputed to be quite mad, but mad or not, it was no bad way of passing the time—remote from the aggravating and imbecile bustle of cities, and the hum-drum laborious life of a country parish, where after all, one had less privacy than in an urban centre.

This romantic idealization of the hermit life had fired Osias' imagination—unluckily, as it now turned out—and he had thought it would be an excellent idea for Onesiphore to take up residence not too far from the hotel, becoming a sort of local saint and mystery man, who would add color to the locality. Onesiphore had demurred at first—he did not wish to be worried by anything, but gradually, under Osias' eloquence, he had warmed to the project and finally consented. Now here he was, at the foot of the Lake Wamphamagog, and both he and his employer fervently wished he was elsewhere.

Like another famous anchorite—one Anthony—temptation came to Saint Onesiphore. Not in so direct and overwhelming a manner—doubtless the devil knew this was not necessary. Unlike St. Anthony, however, Onesiphore succumbed, though fortunately, his fall from grace—if his previous state could be described as grace—was not in the moral sense, a very shattering one.

On the hottest day in August, two lively young women from the hotel found the energy to paddle a canoe three or four miles down the lake. They set out on an aimless exploratory trip, and landed at a

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charming little sandy cove, which it happened, was just short of the rocky point behind which Onesiphore's hut was concealed. The girls pulled their canoe up on the beach, and started to walk up an old tote road. They did not get very far—it had rained the day before, and under the trees there was a suspended vapor—humidity and heat which made the green arch of the woods seem like a Turkish bath. Also, the last straggling black-flies descended upon them with business-like ferocity, so that the girls soon decided to return to the shore.

When they arrived on the beach and saw the lake lying blue under a cloudless sky, they felt that there could be nothing more delectable than a refreshing plunge into the water. They had no bathing suits. . . . but there was not a sign of life, anywhere, and being quite unaware of the existence of a hermit, they decided to bathe without concession to civilized requirements. Spruce, poplar, birch and jack-pine crowded down to the water's edge on every shore—they felt that they could count on freedom from prying eyes. Furthermore, they were modern young women, and the idea of bathing *au naturel*, pleased them. As they tore off their clothes, they laughed and shouted gay insults to each other, stopping to fling bits of driftwood and handfuls of sand. Very high-spirited young girls.

The disturbance reached Onesiphore's ears. He was attired in his hermit's costume (never knowing when customers might approach) and had just awakened from an uneasy, after-dinner snooze. He was quite at

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a loss to account for the shrieks and snatches of song, and curiosity aroused, he scrambled up on the rocks of the point. Fine scrub grew thickly over the top and down the sides, and he could see nothing. He moved forward cautiously, his solitary life had aroused stealthy instincts in him and he preferred to see the disturbers of his solitude before being himself observed. After a few minutes of deliberate progress, he caught sight of the naiads.

It was only a glimpse for they were running about the beach after their first dip and passed from his field of vision almost immediately. But what he did see made his old eyes pop open. . . . brought a flush to his tanned cheeks, and caused his cardiac voltage to increase alarmingly. Again he advanced, but twice as cautiously as before. The devil had won, and without a struggle! Onesiphore feverishly cursed the scrub which obstructed his clearer view. He soon realized that if he wished to see the beach, he would have to go down close to the water's edge. There was a sheer, rocky drop of seven or eight feet, so that achieving it would be a risky business, but that one brief look had been enough to rob him of prudence. From time to time he licked his lips, and if his hands had not been engaged in shoving aside the bushes and disentangling his sackcloth robe which was forever catching in twigs, he would have rubbed them together in an ecstasy of anticipation.

He was very near to the edge now, yet the head-high saplings made an impenetrable screen. Then, he saw a large pine-tree, firmly rooted in a cranny in

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the rock and extending out over the water at an angle of about forty-five degrees. He determined to lie out along the stout trunk. . . . if he could not see from there, he could not see at all! Choosing his footing carefully, and moving with infinite precaution, he edged himself out, clasping his arms tightly around the trunk.

When he felt himself secure, he looked towards the beach. A first glance revealed nothing—then, his incandescent eyes lighted on a pair of delectably-formed legs, evidently belonging to some person lying on the sand. A cedar, growing some twenty yards from him, obstructed his further view. One thickly-foliaged branch screened all but those sweetly-modelled, provoking limbs, the like of which Onesiphore had never before beheld!

Diable! The insatiable voluptuary determined to discover more. He would have to move out a little further on the tree. Then, possibly by bending down, his line of sight would clear the infernal cedar bough. Less cautiously now, he shuffled outwards, seized a small branch growing on the upper side of the trunk, and lowered his head and shoulders, gingerly. The plan succeeded—for an instant. The ravishing spectacle was one which Onesiphore would have been glad to gloat over for an indefinite time. . . . but punishment descended! The devil abandoned him in the moment of success. A sharp crack was heard. . . . Onesiphore had a strange, helpless feeling as the branch which he gripped in his right hand came away, and in a second, his head swung down, his legs

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still around the trunk. He struggled wildly to catch the tree with his hands, bending up from the waist, but the sole result of his effort was to break his grip. . . . Down he fell into the lake below with a solemn and resounding *plop*.

At this unexpected and menacing sound, the girls shrieked and leaped to their feet. At first, they thought some dangerous wild animal had dived off the point. Then Onesiphore's large straw hat floating on the surface, told them that a man, and not a beast, was near. Sandy and wet, they rushed for their clothes and scrambled into them in an incredibly short space of time.

Creeping down to the water's edge, they peered towards the spot where the hat had been seen. It had disappeared, but about fifty yards away, they observed a bald and shining head bobbing solemnly up and down as Onesiphore swam the last few strokes that brought him to shore.



TO SOME OF THE LADIES STAYING AT THE HOTEL

CHAPTER XXIII: NEGOTIATIONS

THE girls told this adventure, in strict confidence, to some of the ladies staying in the hotel, and the story had an immediate circulation. Of course, the Peeping Tom of this spicy tale was soon identified with the supposed sainted hermit, whose reputation took a sudden drop. From a harmless, and indeed an admirable recluse, he developed into a dangerous moral degenerate, with sadistic and homicidal tendencies, and many of the more elderly and unattractive of the porch-rocker gabblers rolled their eyes as they let their imagination dwell on the risk they had run in venturing alone—to the haunt of this brutal pervert. It was roundly declared to be unsafe for any woman to venture out of sight of the hotel, and there was much reprobation of the police authorities who suffered this maniac to remain at large.

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It was not long before the story came to the ears of Osias. He committed the error of laughing obscenely when the stately dowager who approached him with the object of having steps taken to remove the menace, came to the point of her story. He soon saw his mistake, however, and worked up a very good semblance of indignation, promising that if he had any influence, the lake should be rid of the old scoundrel. This assumed concern became very real when two of his guests departed the next day. Proprietor Patelin reflected gloomily that Onesiphore's depopulation of the caravanseraï was a fear all too well founded.

He had almost made up his mind to accept his loss—pay the old fool his money and pack him off, when a promising notion occurred to him. Why should he not go to Saint-Epistemon, drop a hint as to the missing one's whereabouts, and await events? It was almost certain that Zéphyrine would immediately descend upon Onesiphore, and there was a very good chance of a reconciliation. A return to the farm would follow. Nobody had been near the hermitage for days now save Démosthène, and that intrepid youth reported that the old man's temper was becoming positively fiendish.

Osias mulled over the plan for nearly a day, and finally determined to put it into execution. A couple of hours in his car brought him to Saint-Epistemon, where he turned into the Bedaud store. He had decided to plant his news there—he had no intention of informing Mme. Pouget, directly. How, exactly, he

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would divulge the secret, he had not planned but trusted to inspiration.

Télémaque, who happened to be alone, was pleased to see him. He inquired how the hotel was prospering, and congratulated the fortunate proprietor that the venture had been so successful in its first season. Conversation languished. Osias wished someone else would come in—it would be more satisfactory if his announcement could bring consternation to a representative gathering. Nearly half an hour passed, and at last tired of waiting, he asked with the best appearance of carelessness that he could muster:

“And the old Onesiphore—has anything been heard of him?”

A startling crepitation of oaths burst from Télémaque. Osias gaped at him.

“But my dear Télémaque. . . . what have you? I am not aware that I have said anything to cause you to become enraged.”

Télémaque had recovered himself and felt ashamed of having given his feelings rein.

“Oh,” he explained, “it is nothing to me—perhaps I am wrong to have so much feeling. . . . but when I think of the shameless manner in which that old villain has abandoned his wife and child. . . . abandoned her, after having made the basest assertions as to her conduct. . . . I cannot contain myself.”

Osias remarked that his honest indignation did him credit, and continued to observe him intently, while Bedaud mumbled his denunciation of Ones-

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iphore's heartless behavior. He soon came to the conclusion that there was more behind the shopkeeper's bitter words than a mere altruistic sense of outrage. Concurrently, his curiosity was aroused. An explanation presented itself.

"I suppose Onesiphore went away owing you a large sum of money?" he interrupted.

"What?" *Télémache* seemed slightly astonished. "Why, no, in truth, he owed me nothing. He had settled his account several months before."

There was silence for a moment, the men regarding each other suspiciously; *Télémache* a trifle uneasy. . . . and *Osias* still searching for the reason of the other's strange outburst of venom. He determined on a bold gambit.

"What would you say, *Télémache*," he began, slowly, "if I told you that I had news of Onesiphore, and that he is still alive?" The speaker observed with satisfaction that the listener changed color.

"What? Say then. . . ." *Télémache* gulped. "Tell me at once what you have heard."

Osias leaned back, and smiled in a superior sort of manner. He was quite sure that *Télémache* was exceedingly anxious to know where Onesiphore now was. The reason for that anxiety he proposed to learn, before he gave any information.

"It seems to me, *Télémache*," he observed, airily, "that you are more than a little interested in this matter."

"Why yes. . . . of course. . . . Was I not there when Onesiphore departed? Have I not been sore at

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heart, watching the sufferings of that good woman, Zéphyrine Pouget?"

Osias laughed loudly. "Télémache," he said, ironically, "your heart has grown very, very tender. I am so glad to see it."

Télémache glared. He felt that he had given himself away. Well, he could make a counter-charge.

"Osias," he shouted, "you cannot fool me! You *know* where Onesiphore Pouget is! I demand that you reveal his hiding place!"

"Demand, indeed? You are very intense."

There was a pause while the two sharpest bargainers in County Richmond faced each other, striving to penetrate the thoughts that lay behind belligerent brows.

"I see that you do not deny knowing where he is," charged Télémache, eventually.

"As for that—well, have it as you like. Perhaps I have seen him, but do not know where he is now. Perhaps I could lay my hand upon him. . . . if I saw any advantage in so doing."

"Advantage? How can you talk of advantage, when that poor woman. . . ."

"We would understand each other better, Télémache," interrupted Osias, crisply, "if you would abandon your childish attempt to fool me with your crocodile tears over Mme. Pouget. You know as well as I do, that if there were not something in the wind—if there were not some very strong reason for you to see Onesiphore, Mme. Pouget could starve to death, and you would not lose a wink of sleep."

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Télémaché swore violently. "Because you have a heart of stone yourself, M. Patelin," he countered, "you need not think that everyone is the same."

"Oh, very well then. If you do not wish to confide in me, I have no more time to spend here." Osias pretended to be on the point of departure, and Télémaché saw his chance slipping away.

"Listen, Osias—as an old friend—you might oblige me by telling me where Onesiphore is to be found. You are right—there is a reason why I should see him—very soon! But I cannot tell you what it is, for the secret is not mine. You see? If it were only myself to consider, you should have it in a minute, for I know I can trust you, but I am sworn to tell nobody."

"Oho! A secret? Very interesting. And who are your partners?"

"That, I cannot say." Télémaché was very sulky.

"Very well then—you tell me nothing—I tell you nothing! That is a fair exchange. Good-day."

Télémaché temporized. "One moment. Will you wait here for an hour, until I consult my friends? Then, if they are willing, you will be informed. . . . on condition that you promise to tell us where Onesiphore is."

Osias considered, and then with an air of conferring a great favor, gave his consent. Télémaché led him into the house back of the store, and directed Mme. Bedaud to give him dinner. He rushed off to the Begin farm. Polycarpe and Hercule, when the news was broken to them, fell into uncontrollable ex-

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citement and declared vehemently that the information must be wormed from Osias at all costs—even to taking him into partnership. But that would be a last resource—they would begin by merely divulging that they wished to buy the Pouget farm. Télémache expressed grave doubts that Osias would swallow this tale, and was in favor of finding some more colorable excuse. Polycarpe, however, was insistent on the need for immediate action, and pointed out that at any moment the Asbestos Company might approach Mme. Pouget, and all would be ruined. There would be no profit, then, for anybody. Better reduce their shares from a third to a quarter, than lose all.

His views prevailed, and the three drove back to the store, where behind locked doors the great conference opened.

Télémache did most of the negotiating for the syndicate, but as he feared, Osias was incredulous when told that it was merely a question of buying the Pouget farm. The fencing and bargaining lasted nearly two hours, and several times they seemed on the point of breaking up altogether. At last, Osias emerged victorious. After most solemn and fearful oaths of secrecy and fidelity, and a promise on Osias' part to lead them immediately to Onesiphore on being acquainted with the secret. . . . and counter-promises on the part of the three to withhold nothing, the cards were laid on the table. Osias had great difficulty in preserving his attitude of scepticism as the tale unfolded, and in the end, became frankly enthusiastic, for he had been promised a share of the

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profits, and risked nothing. Pure chance had placed him in this favorable position. With a warm glow of satisfaction, he congratulated himself on the humanity that had induced him to offer Onesiphore employment.

The partners determined to approach Onesiphore, and make him an offer for the farm. It was decided that Polycarpe should be the one to conduct these negotiations. If any of the others appeared, his suspicions would be aroused. Polycarpe did not care much for the idea of facing the old fellow, considering the reason for his departure from the parish, but the hope of gain nerved him. He took the precaution of specifying that Hercule should be within call—they would paddle down the lake together, and Osias and Télémache would wait at the hotel.

In the glow of sunset, then, Polycarpe and Hercule might have been seen, grunting at the oars, and straining their eyes to recognize the landmarks given to them for finding the hermitage. They rounded the rocky point, and observed the glint of a fire. The boat was beached, and with a brief direction to Hercule to wait there but to come to his assistance at top speed if he should shout, Polycarpe started to climb the winding path to the hut. In one hand he carried a small tin pail filled with blueberries, and in the other a large bag of cookies. This had been the suggestion of Osias, who unconscious of the zoological analogy, remarked that the old fellow had grown greedy for dainties in his solitude, and would appreciate them very much.

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Polycarpe's nerves were in taut condition as he approached the hut, the door of which was open. He took care to make plenty of noise, and expected Onesiphore to emerge, momentarily. There was no sign from the interior, however, until he was within four or five paces of the door, when a sudden roar split the silence.

"Go away, thou filthy brute!"

A rock whizzed by not a foot from Polycarpe's head. Here, indeed, was a reception! He had hardly bargained for anything like this. He paused, undecided whether to retreat, or to brave the storm and press on. Onesiphore was swearing steadily, though not in the least monotonously, and Polycarpe caught several allusions to 'beast,' and then the phrase "*Maudite chèvre*," repeated several times. He breathed a relieved sigh. He understood it now—Onesiphore had mistaken him for the goat which Osias had declared to be his sole companion.

"I am not a goat!" announced Polycarpe brightly. "I am your old friend, Polycarpe Begin!" And he stepped forward into the light.

Onesiphore's appearance startled him. The deep-set eyes, flaming with anger, the long hair and beard and the uncouth garment of sacking, combined to give him an appalling aspect. Polycarpe fell back a pace. For an instant it seemed that Onesiphore was about to spring on him . . . then he relaxed, and the familiar grin took possession of his features.

"Well, so it is—*le Sacré Wabache*!" he greeted. "Do not be afraid. . . . I am not going to eat you!"

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"Onesiphore," said Polycarpe, recovering, "I am sorry to find you here, in such a state."

"I thank you for your consideration, but I am quite happy here. May I ask to what I owe the honor of this visit? I expect that disgusting and honorless thief, Patelin, has informed you of my retreat—though he swore not to."

Polycarpe inclined his head and set down his burdens.

"I have brought you some blueberries, and some little cakes," he said, solemnly. "I thought perhaps some little delicacy might be welcome. . . ."

Onesiphore took up the bag, peered into it, selected a large cookie and began to munch away with evident relish.

"Tell me," he queried, suddenly, emitting a small shower of crumbs as he spoke, "how many in the parish know where I am?"

"There is no one but myself, and Osias."

"Indeed! Well, what do you want? You did not come all the way from Saint-Epistemon to give me a bag of cakes, did you?"

"No. I will tell you the reason. Your wife is alone with Mathilde—it is not easy for her."

"Kindly do not speak to me of my wife."

Polycarpe reddened but persisted:

"I hope you have realized. . . . that is, I never. . . . Zéphyrine. . . . it was quite ridiculous. . . ."

"*Ferme ta gueule!* I said, don't speak of my wife, unless you want me to become enraged. I wish to hear nothing. . . . to forget what has passed. . . . I

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hold nothing against you," he concluded, in what was for him a kindly tone.

Encouraged, Polycarpe continued:

"Here is what I came to see you for. I wish to buy your land. I have spoken of this before—you may remember, my herd of cows is growing and I need more pasture."

Onesiphore seemed to be regarding him with an expression of sardonic triumph. This passed off, and he replied in an uninterested way:

"I do not remember your ever mentioning it."

"Well, if I did not actually say anything definite, I made hints. It has long been a plan of mine."

"*Eh, bien*, you might as well forget it, for I am not going to sell my farm."

"But you are not going back, are you?"

"Who knows?"

"I thought you said you were leaving the parish, forever."

"I may have said so—but there is nothing to prevent me from changing my mind."

"Listen then. . . . for many reasons it would be distasteful for you to return to Saint-Epistemon. Now, I am prepared to make you a good offer for your farm, and you may take the money and set up in some other parish, where—where there will not be so many unpleasant memories to harass you."

"What unpleasant memories? I have none so terrible that they make it impossible for me to live there." Onesiphore was very bland.

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"Well—that is—if you do not mind living there, why do you roost in these woods, like a crow?"

"Oh, a mere whim. I desire to be solitary—to have the experience. Few men have known the delight of communing unrestrictedly with nature."

"And a goat—and skunks," added Polycarpe, somewhat maliciously.

Onesiphore's face darkened.

"I am habituated to such neighbors for many years now!"

This shot reached the target, even though it did not score a bull's eye. Polycarpe squirmed somewhat, but managed to control his impulse to respond in kind. Instead, he observed:

"There is no use passing silly remarks back and forth, like school-boys. Let us talk like men of business. I am here to make you a good offer for the farm."

Onesiphore combed his beard gently with the fork he had taken up in his hand.

"Well, I am waiting to hear your offer—I bind myself to nothing—but perhaps if you make it attractive enough. . . ."

This was better, Polycarpe said to himself. He looked narrowly at the old man, but it was impossible to tell anything from his benignant expression, or to pierce the thoughts behind those black slits of eyes.

"Fifteen hundred dollars!"

He uttered the words abruptly, to make them sound as much like an ultimatum as possible.

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Onesiphore widened his eyes incredulously, and after a derisive snort, remarked:

“You cannot be serious, my dear Polycarpe. Fifteen hundred dollars for such land as mine? But perhaps you mean to buy only a part of it?”

“Not at all—fifteen hundred dollars, for everything. As you know, it is a generous price for a farm in our parish.”

“Pooh—you evidently delude yourself that you are bargaining with a half-witted boy for bulrushes! There is no use in talking to me about such a paltry sum. For that, I would not give you the land, alone, uncleared—It is altogether ridiculous!”

“Well, perhaps you might place a value on the farm, yourself. Then we will see whether there is any more use talking.”

It was now Onesiphore’s turn to pause—to make the announcement more impressive.

“Seven thousand dollars!” he pronounced at last, leaning forward, hands on knees.

Polycarpe nearly fell over backwards. “Seven thousand dollars? Why not seven millions? But—but—no farm has ever brought nearly so much as that! Not even the old Lamontagne’s, which is recognized as being all of the very best land, with a fine house and barns—and furthermore, it was sold during the war, when everybody got big prices for hay and oats, and prosperity reigned. No—*five* thousand dollars was the price of that wonderful farm, and Etienne Pacoste, who bought it, repents the bargain now, for he goes deep into debt.”

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Onesiphore shrugged himself, and selected another cookie.

Polycarpe continued, "*Tiens*, there is no war now! It is difficult to get anything for hay, and every month the cheese-maker tries to pay us less for milk. So be sensible, my dear Onesiphore, and listen to this offer, which I am robbing myself to make, and which I should never dream of extending to anyone other than an old friend like yourself. Now—one thousand, seven hundred dollars!"

"Polycarpe, you know that when I say a thing, there is no humbuggery about it. When I say seven thousand dollars, I do not mean seventeen hundred. I am not one of those who chaffers and bargains. I do not wish to sell my farm—if you do not pay my price, I am not going to reduce it! But if you come to me and say—'Here is seven thousand dollars,' then, the farm is yours!"

Polycarpe's breath was taken away by the decided tone of this speech. He had expected that Onesiphore would hold out for several hundred dollars more than he offered, with perhaps some other considerations, as a cow, or a horse to make weight, but the price named was altogether absurd. It flashed across his mind that perhaps the old man had wind of the asbestos—but no, Onesiphore could not be supposed to be so stupid as to let the land go for even seven thousand dollars, if he knew there was a corporation anxious to buy it. He stared owlshly at his former neighbor, until the latter yawned, and observed that the hour was late and past his bed-time, and that the

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morrow would do for further negotiations, if there were to be any. Polycarpe concluded that consultation with his partners was necessary, and said good night. Onesiphore dismissed him with the remark that he would remember his name in his nightly devotions, which, as a hermit in good standing, he never neglected and which might be expected to possess great efficacy.

For three days the bargaining went on, and for three days, Onesiphore steadfastly refused to abate his price. The syndicate was nearly desperate and held meetings early and late. The difficulty was that between them they did not have the ready cash to meet Onesiphore's demands, otherwise their eagerness to close the transaction would have overcome their reluctance to pay so much more than the market price—the market price, that is, of farm lands not asbestos mines. Osias was in favor of postponing negotiations until Onesiphore had had a little more solitude to macerate his stubborn spirit, but Télé-mache and Polycarpe were urgent on the point of settling as soon as possible, since every day brought nearer the time when the Asbestos Company must enter the field. Osias could have found the money with a little trouble, but it would have meant going to the bank and borrowing, which he was disinclined to do.

Both Télé-mache and Osias now regretted that the actual dealing with Onesiphore had been left to Polycarpe, the least astute of the three, and no match for

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the old man at all. But it was too late to introduce another emissary, for Onesiphore's suspicions certainly would be aroused.

The syndicate raised their offer by degrees, until it stood at four thousand dollars. Polycarpe had spent a whole afternoon endeavoring to win acceptance of this amount and had gone to the length of providing a quart of excellent *whiskey blanc* to soften the heart of the obdurate hermit. Onesiphore, however, while appreciating the liquor, insisted that Polycarpe should take drink for drink with him, so no advantage was gained. Polycarpe came home in the dusk, in tears at his neighbor's hardness of heart. He had induced the old fellow to come down to six thousand, five hundred but that, it appeared, was the irreducible minimum.

Another council of war was held. Hercule had been sent back to the Begin farm, and Télémache had returned to Saint-Epistemon, driving out in the evenings to find how the business had gone. After a great deal of talk, it was decided to increase the capitalization of the enterprise to six thousand dollars. They were fairly certain that Onesiphore would take this. Télémache and Osias pointed out that as they were providing the bulk of the money they would expect a commensurate share of the profits. Polycarpe, who had been sitting for the most part with his head between his hands (*whiskey blanc*, disappointment and anxiety having combined to afflict him with a desperate *migraine*) roused at this proposal, and said point blank that he would have his share, irrespective

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of what moneys the others supplied, or else he would go to Onesiphore and tell him the whole story. All attempts of the other partners to move him from this stand by reasoning or threats, were vain. It was with great difficulty that a working arrangement was arrived at. There would be one more effort made. Polycarpe was authorized to raise the offer to six thousand, if need be, but that was the limit.

The next morning he set off, after nearly an hour of instructions as to the mode of bargaining he should employ. He was somewhat despondent. He felt that the immovable old blockhead would wreck all their plans by his insane cupidity. It was a glorious day in late September; the first frost had touched the hardwoods on the hills bordering the lake, and the scene was fit for the admiration of the gods, but its beauty, if he had perceived it, would have seemed an austere mockery to Polycarpe. He contemplated drowning himself in the intensely blue waters of the lake if his mission failed.

This desperate course, however, turned out to be unnecessary. Scarcely an hour later, Osias glancing down the lake saw the rowboat returning, Polycarpe tugging valiantly at the oars, and Onesiphore reclining picturesquely in the stern. The hotel-keeper was down at the wharf to meet them, and one glance at Polycarpe's face was enough to tell him that success was attained. A stealthy whisper 'Five thousand, five hundred,' when the ex-hermit was hauling his goods out of the craft, added to his good humor. He felt so benignant that he paid his employee the

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agreed wages to date without a murmur, and lent his car for the return to Saint-Epistemon. The only difficulty that occurred was when Osias expressed concern as to the welfare of Beausoleil, the goat, but that passed with no worse than subterranean mutterings on Onesiphore's part.

The return of the prodigal—with Polycarpe of all people—set every tongue in the village wagging, and they had hardly slackened when the further news that Onesiphore had sold his farm to his neighbor set them vibrating anew. No details were available, for both principals maintained an impenetrable reserve—except that Polycarpe needed more room for his pasturage. This did not seem a valid reason to the other farmers, who remarked that Polycarpe's herd had not increased for the past two years as he had been paying out money for lawyer's bills, and other nonsense. M. Cabochin was sounded out as to the terms of the transfer, but the learned gentleman drily disclosed that he had not been employed in the transaction, the business having been handled by the notary at Harrierville. M. Cabochin contrived to imply that the circumstance of employing an outside notary indicated that there was something peculiar, and doubtless dishonest, about the whole affair.

Onesiphore took up his residence in a small house on the outskirts of the village, and settled down to a life of ease, interrupted occasionally by a day's work when anyone had need of an extra hand. The villagers saw little of him; he had abandoned his habits of oratory and controversy in Télémache's store, and

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had nothing more to say than the usual common-places about the weather, politics, and the price of hay and pulp-wood. Everyone found his changed manner strange in the extreme, and none more so than Osias, Télémache and Polycarpe. They had expected he would be unable to refrain from boasting of the remarkable price he had obtained for the farm, but, as Télémache said, although he might boast for a while, he would soon change his tune when the Asbestos Company representative came to the parish to negotiate for the property. In general, his quietude was attributed to hardships undergone while absent from his home and the humiliation which attended his departure.

Zéphyrine appeared to be the happiest woman in the parish, since her husband had come back. No word of recrimination had passed her lips—not even when her demand to be informed of his whereabouts during his absence met with a blank refusal. She reflected that he was back again, and it would be unwise to worry him . . . she had no wish to be the cause of his departure a second time. While life was easier for her in the village than it had been on the farm, and she surmised that the sale had been profitable, yet if the old man went away again, she would be left without means of subsistence.

Mathilde also was happy, for she was betrothed, and to her former lover. Hercule had returned to her feet. This was a distinct triumph—not only over the other girls of the parish, whose sly remarks and giggles she had found hard to bear during the months

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following Hercule's flight to Montreal—but over her mother, who had prophesied inevitable spinsterhood for her whenever they had a disagreement.

For nearly a fortnight after he returned with his famous news, Hercule had contrived to avoid meeting Mathilde. He assured himself that he had given her no promise, and that he had done nothing dishonorable in running away when he felt the betrothal into which he had been forced, to be intolerable. At the same time, it was awkward to face *mademoiselle*.

This state of mind continued until one night following an idle day when the full moon called him out of doors. He strolled down the road, replete with his mother's heavy cooking, and also full of a vague sentiment. He thought with regret of the lights of Montreal, the moving picture houses where humble men might, by the well-known psychological phenomenon of projection, behold themselves as dare-devil heroes and the lovers of ineffably fair ladies. He remembered more particularly the ever-changing throng of girls on St. Catherine Street—all intriguing, and some of them beautiful. He recalled thrilling tableaux, reflected to him in the windshield of his taxi, when it swooped under arc lights late at night. He thought of adventures he had met with himself—of forlorn, peripatetic damsels, conveyed in the early hours to discreet flats or furtive lodgings, and the way in which the demands of the meter had been satisfied.

In the midst of these disturbing memories, he perceived a female figure approaching. It was Mathilde.

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For a second he was uncertain whether to turn tail or go on—then he decided. It would be ridiculous to run away.

“Bonsoir, Mathilde!”

She did not reply, and seemed about to pass him. He placed himself in her path.

“Why do you not answer when I speak to you?”

“You should know well enough. Let me go.”

“I am not stopping you.” He stood aside, and then when she proceeded caught up to her.

“Mathilde—we are neighbors; there is no reason why we should not be friends.”

“Once, you said you wanted to be more than a friend. . . . then, without a word to me, without a sign. . . . you went away.”

Hercule had difficulty in meeting this direct attack.

“Well. . . . perhaps. . . . I did not think that would mean anything to you, in particular,” he said, lamely. There was no reply, but he heard a snuffle.

“Mathilde,” he cried, strangely electrified by this evidence of emotion, “why do you weep?”

Again no reply but an unmistakable sob.

“Mathilde. . . . answer me? What is it?”

He halted and seized her, swinging her round to face him. She hid her eyes beneath her arm and there was a little struggle before he could tear it away. Mathilde was a fine strong girl, and he was breathing heavily when he succeeded. He held her tightly in his arms and kissed her with lurid and unreasoning exultation, and the fire communicated by that long embrace, and the moon’s light, so bright and so false,

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worked their customary magic so that he beheld her beautiful!

Arms about waists they turned, and strolled swaying down the road until they reached the shadows of a grove of spruce trees. There, a flat stone invited them to sit. Hercule recalled certain amorous technique learned in the city, and discovered with blissful amazement the difference between the frank response of unsophisticated love and the simulations of the over-practised. When the stone grew too hard, it was natural to move to the grassy bank, despite the dew. . . .

Next Sunday, the banns of marriage were announced between Hercule Begin and Mathilde Pouget. Hercule, while the priest droned out the formula, glanced over at his promised bride sitting in the next pew, and shuddered ever so slightly. But he closed his eyes. . . . he recalled the evening of the harvest moon. . . . the shadows beneath the pine tree, and was consoled.

He reflected that while every night did not bring a harvest moon, at any rate it brought obscurity.



REACHED THE SHADOWS OF A GROVE

CHAPTER XXIV: VICTORY!

FOR nearly a fortnight after completing the purchase of the farm, the syndicate relaxed. The dickering and tension had been terrific. But presently, it occurred first to one and then another, that some action on the part of the Asbestos Company would now be in order. Three months had passed since the surveyor had run his line, and more than two since Hercule's M. Bilsky had disclosed the project to develop the Pouget property. Surely by now the legal and financial preliminaries were concluded, and an agent armed with a cheque-book might be expected to appear in the parish.

But no agent came, and Télémache could hardly bring himself to be civil to the commercial travellers who dropped in to the store on business, when he dis-

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covered their disassociation with the Asbestos Company.

October wore on and the members of the syndicate grew more and more anxious. At length, at their third or fourth meeting, it was decided that Osias should write to the Company, announcing that certain valuable asbestos deposits were now being held, and that negotiations for their purchase might be opened at any time. It was felt that this placed the syndicate in a weaker position than if the Company had made an approach, but in the circumstances, all felt that the present uncertainty was not to be endured, and even if the Company should say that no operations would be undertaken this year, still some indications would be given of the lay of the land. The speculators would know how long they might have to wait before cashing in on the investment.

Osias spent nearly a week, on and off, in the drafting of his communication. . . . had it approved by his partners, and finally despatched it. It was allowed to be a diplomatic masterpiece. Télémache and Polycarpe cheered up considerably, convinced that in a very short time their doubts would be resolved.

They were!

In three days, Osias had a reply. He called a meeting in Télémache's store, saying that he had the Asbestos Company's letter, but reserving all details. Télémache and Polycarpe, waiting for Osias, who was driving up from the hotel, tried to pretend an exultation they did not feel, and spoke bravely to one another of the use to which they would put their

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gains. They could not conceal their eagerness at the obscurity of their partner's message—suspecting that if all had been well, he would not have left them in doubt.

One glance at Osias' face told them their worst fears were justified. White-faced and grim, he strode into the store, pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and flung it on the counter.

“Read that!” he commanded.

They read—as well as they could, for the missive was in English. It ran as follows,

Mr. Oscar Balletin,
Lake Wamphamagog Inn,
Ste. Therese P. O.
Prov. Quebec.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 20th. has been received.

We note what you say re asbestos deposits on land which you control, but regret to inform you that we are not interested in purchasing mining rights in the area mentioned, at the present time.

Some years ago, our engineers investigated deposits in Dudswell Township, and from what our records show, those you control were surveyed at this time. The geologists' report was that the grade was not very high, and taking into consideration the difficulties of transportation, extracting and crushing the rock, etc., we found that the costs would not allow us to develop this property profitably now, or in the future, so far as can be foreseen. Our present properties, which are very extensive, will be sufficient to supply all the asbestos that can be marketed for many years to come.

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We thank you, nevertheless, for bringing the matter to our attention.

Yours very truly,
Alex. Silberstein,
Vice-President,

AS/MG. The Asbestos Company of Quebec.

"What does it mean?" asked T  l  mache, in a hushed voice. His knowledge of English was rudimentary, but the manner of Osias had told him all he wanted to know.

"It means this," roared Osias, suddenly thumping the counter with his fist. "I have been made a fool of by your ridiculous tales of engineers and drunken men of business, and that two thousand dollars of my good money is in the hands of that old reprobate, Onesiphore Pouget!"

"And two thousand, five hundred of mine!" shouted T  l  mache, taking his cue from the hotel-keeper, and turning on the open-mouthed Polycarpe.

"What do you propose to do about that?" hissed Osias, menacingly, coming close to the unfortunate Polycarpe who, slower witted than the others, did not yet perceive the extent of the catastrophe. He could understand the attitude of his partners, however, and his ready temper flamed up.

"You shout at me, do you?" he bellowed. "I am no thief! Take your ugly snout from before my face, Osias Patelin, before I bite it off!"

Osias hastily complied, and Polycarpe continued:

"Onesiphore has a thousand dollars of mine, I may

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remind you, and I can afford it less easily than you gentlemen can spare the money you contributed."

"You have the farm," pointed out Télémache.

"Give me my thousand dollars, and you can have the farm, whenever you like!"

"That is a fine way to talk! It is a pity you could not have been so cautious, two months ago! If you had not been an imbecile, we would not have paid Onesiphore more than two thousand dollars. But he can twist you round his finger."

"I, at any rate, was not afraid to go to his retreat and face him," countered Polycarpe. "Even if I am not so clever as the *messieurs* Bedaud and Patelin, at fleeing people!"

Silence fell for a few minutes, while the disgruntled partners cooled their wrath. Eventually, the discussion was resumed in calmer fashion, and after much talk it was decided that it would be useless to communicate further with the Asbestos Company of Quebec, but that some other companies might be interested. Osias Patelin, taking courage, volunteered to go to Montreal, where most of them had head offices, and see whether he could dispose of the holding. He demanded, however, a contribution towards his expenses. It was very grudgingly paid upon his flat refusal to go, otherwise.

In a week he was back, empty-handed, and his heart filled with rage. All the corporations he had approached—and he had gone to every firm which he thought might be even remotely interested—had

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either replied in the same terms as the Asbestos Company of Quebec, or else had said bluntly and definitely, that they would have nothing to do with the proposition.

There was another meeting of the syndicate. After a round of heated reproaches, Télémache took the floor, and spoke as follows:

"My friends, we may as well face facts. . . . We have been fooled. I do not blame anyone, for I was fooled, too. But consider this. . . . an engineer comes from Montreal, with instructions to survey for a railway up to Onesiphore Pouget's place. It is evident that no asbestos company paid him to do that. Consider also, that some man pretending to be drunk, finds Polycarpe Begin's son, tells him a yarn about asbestos on the Pouget farm and a company which is going to mine it. Now, who paid that engineer, and who sent the drunken Bilsky to stand in Hercule's way? Listen, *messieurs!* Onesiphore Pouget was in Montreal, last winter, and Onesiphore knew that Hercule was driving a taxi, there. Now, these facts might not be proof in a court of law, but they are enough to tell me that old Pouget, the cunning scoundrel—probably helped by his shyster nephew, Herménégilde—is at the bottom of the matter, and that he has fooled us well."

"*Torricu!* But you are perfectly right!" Osias relapsed into febrile blasphemy.

"I wonder I did not think of it before. Now you put it in that way, it seems perfectly plain." Poly-

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carpe almost forgot to be enraged in his admiration at Télémaque's astuteness.

"There is only one thing we can do," continued the storekeeper, "and that is go to Onesiphore and force him to return our money. We will threaten him with the law, and see if we cannot bring him to terms. He will soon cease to think he is clever when we tell all we know."

This was agreed, and the three marched down the main street to the temporary home of the Pouget family. Onesiphore was sitting outside the door, smoking his pipe, and watching their approach with a benevolence which was proof against him. Even his cheerful "*Bonjour, messieurs,*" was ignored, but he did not change countenance.

Polycarpe fired the first shot, as had been arranged. "Onesiphore, how would you like to buy back your farm?" he demanded.

"Well, well!" Onesiphore took his pipe from his mouth and lifted his eyebrows. "Our excellent little *Wabache* appears to have his feathers ruffled about something."

"Don't call me that! We wish that you would give back at once the money we paid you, and in return you may have your old farm!" Polycarpe was dithering with excitement and fury.

"This is a strange way to talk! In the first place, what do you mean by 'we'? I only dealt with one person."

Osias took a hand. "You know well enough that

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Polycarpe had no five thousand odd dollars—therefore he must have borrowed it from someone! In fact, he borrowed it from Télémache and myself!”

“But how generous of you to lend him all that money! My previous knowledge of you would hardly lead me to suppose. . . .”

“Listen, my old one, we did not come to hear a lot of your blather! To be quite plain, we know that you got that money from Polycarpe by a trick, and we are here to see that you give it back!” Osias snarled, and the other two vented applauding growls.

“Indeed? Then suppose I tell you,” Onesiphore was beginning to smile dangerously, “in the most polite and exquisite language, to go to the devil?”

“Take care what you say! Do not anger us too greatly, or you will regret it!” warned Télémache.

“I never waste emotion in regrets!” pronounced Onesiphore, loftily.

“When you are behind the bars of a jail, perhaps you will find time for them,” Osias threatened.

“Jail? You are using wild language! Take care that you do not find yourself facing an action for slander!”

“There is no use trying to bluff us,” went on Osias, warning to the dispute. “We are aware of your artful manœuvres. Look me in the eye and say whether you have ever heard of a man called Pratt—an engineer?”

Onesiphore gazed blandly into the hotel-keeper’s hot eyes, and after a seeming effort of recollection, inquired, “Pratt? It was not he who built the Quebec Bridge, was it?”

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The impudence of this reply left Osias speechless, but Télémache took up the interrogation.

"Have you then, ever heard of a Jew, called Irving Bilsky?" he shouted.

Onesiphore's expression took on an unbelievable urbanity, as he replied:

"I am not so fortunate as to possess any friends among the chosen people. But why do you bore me with these foolish questions, about people I have never heard of?"

"You will sing a different song when they are put to you in the witness box," snorted Osias, again taking the lead.

"In the witness box? We are to have a trial, then, and witnesses? *Bon!* Where are these gentlemen who are to be your witnesses?"

A pause ensued. Télémache and Polycarpe felt that Osias had gone too far. That was the weak point in their position—they had not the least notion of how to lay their hands on the *messieurs* Pratt and Bilsky.

"The law will find them for us," Osias blustered, feebly.

Onesiphore laughed.

"A belief in the omnipotence of the law is a characteristic of stupid and uneducated men," he observed, conversationally. "Not that the law cannot do a great deal—if the applicant has a long enough purse!"

Of this, Osias was perfectly aware. For all his loud talk and in spite of his conviction that he had been defrauded, he realized that to get redress by legal

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action would be a very expensive and uncertain mode of procedure. He determined to make one more attempt. In a few sentences, he recounted the events that led up to the purchase of the Pouget farm, at so elevated a valuation, and concluded:

"So, by this underhand means, you led us to believe there was asbestos on your farm, and that a company was anxious to buy it. That is fraud—and you would be well advised to return us our money, when we will say no more about it." He ended on a tone of reasonable protest—almost wheedling.

"Oh, so that is it?" Onesiphore was grim. "Permit me to say that in the deed, there was no mention of asbestos. When Polycarpe came to me, and begged me, almost on his knees—"

"It is a lie," shouted Polycarpe. "I was never on my knees!" Ignoring the interruption, Onesiphore went on:

"—and begged me to sell my farm, did he mention the word asbestos? No! Let me point out something to you. You make wild accusations of dishonesty on my part with no proof whatever! Do you think a jury would consider it a very upright thing to do, to try and flim-flam a poor farmer out of his land at a paltry price, when you knew well that it was of a great value? Reflect on that, and then say whether you deserve sympathy."

The syndicate did reflect on it, but not for long.

Osias, whose fury had been growing all through Onesiphore's speech, leapt forward, and shaking his fist under the old man's nose, screamed:

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“Repay us our money, miserable old scoundrel, Or . . .”

He was interrupted at this point, for Polycarpe who had seized him by the tail of the coat, jerked sharply backwards. This saved him from a violent blow which Onesiphore, now thoroughly enraged, aimed at him, but it precipitated him backwards on to the ground. He had the misfortune to light on a very knobby stone. The action cooled off the passions of the antagonists, somewhat, and the three partners, without further parley, withdrew beyond the fence, Osias tenderly rubbing his coccygeal region. After a whispered consultation, the syndicate made off in the direction of M. Cabochin's residence. As they turned in, they glanced towards the old man's home, and saw him, leaning on the gate and shaking with laughter.

In an hour, they emerged from the law office, somewhat sadder, and no wiser. M. Cabochin had confirmed their fears that a recourse to the law would hold out no definite prospect of recovering their money, and would certainly be expensive. He irritated them exceedingly by a long disquisition on their folly in employing outside talent to draw up the deed, claiming that if they had made use of his services, this trouble would have been avoided, for he would have seen that there was something strange about the affair, and would have gone to the bottom of it. He was didactic in the extreme: the partners felt it would not be too much to say that he gloated over their misfortunes. The only advice he gave them was to make such a settlement as they were able—that they were

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at Onesiphore's mercy. He, himself, did not care to act in the matter.

This advice, after a month's vain recriminations and revilings, they determined to take, and Télé-mache was entrusted with the bargaining.

In a fortnight more, Onesiphore was back on his farm, holding the deed, which cost him two thousand dollars, and other good and valuable considerations.

It was the hour after Mass and the store was full when Onesiphore walked in. It was his first appearance for nearly a year, and with two exceptions, he was greeted warmly—boisterously.

"Eh, bien, le vieux est de retour!"

"Well, old monk, would you like to buy a nice goat, *hein?*"

"Onesiphore, I'll bet you read some fine books since you've been away."

"They say you have become rich, during your travels!"

Onesiphore's eyes sparkled, and his mouth curved into the ancient and formidable grin.

"Bonjour, Athanase. . . . Bonjour, Jean-Baptiste. . . . Bonjour, Télé-mache. . . . Bonjour, Médéric. . . . Bonjour, Polycarpe, and Evariste. . . ." He waved his hand with a royal gesture of acknowledgment.

"Tell us how you became rich, Onesiphore," demanded Athanase Duperrier, when the confusion had quieted down.

Onesiphore pulled down his customary leaf from

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the bundle of *tabac naturel*, and glanced round, good-humoredly:

“*Eh, bien, messieurs*, you must excuse me,” he deprecated. “Since living as a hermit—as you may have heard—I do not talk so much as formerly. . . . But, if you wish to know how to make money,” here he paused an instant, “the *messieurs* Bedaud and Begin will be glad to give you a little account of the excellent opportunities in the industry asbestos. . . .”

THE END



YOU MUST EXCUSE ME, GENTLEMEN

GLOSSARY

absolument nue—stark naked

adieux—farewells

affaire—affair

affaires—business

aliéné—insane person

allons—let us go

amours—loves, love affairs

arpenteur—surveyor

assistance—audience, company

au naturel—according to nature

au revoir—good-bye

aussi—also

avec sa chèvre—with his goat

avocat—lawyer

barrage—obstacle; on the farm, a rough fence of saplings to prevent cattle straying from a field

ba'tême (for *baptême*)—old Canadian oath, baptism

bees mon cou (for *baise mon cou*)—kiss my neck

bêtise—blunder, stupidity

GLOSSARY

- bien*—well
bon—good
bonjour—good-day, good-bye
bonsoir—good-night
cabane—cabin, hut
ça, c'est sûr—that is right, most certainly
camouflet—explosion of buried bomb
cana'yenne (for *canadienne*)—Canadian girl
caulisse (for *calice*)—old French Canadian oath
cause célèbre—famous trial, famous suit
ça va?—how goes it?
cercle—group, club
certain—surely, sure
c'est ça—that's right
c'est tout—that is all
chemise de nuit—night-dress, night-shirt
coiffe—hood, cowl
combats à outrance—fights to the finish
comme on dit—as one says
comment?—what's that?, how's that?
comment ça va?—how goes it?, how do you do?
Commission des Liqueurs—Liquor Commission
compre?—pidgin English for: do you understand?
conseil du roi—king's counsel
costumier du théâtre—theatrical costumer
'coute donc! (for *écoute donc!*)—listen here!
curé—pastor, parish priest
cuisine—kitchen
débâcle—in French Canada, usually the movement of the ice in rivers in the spring; extended meanings are: the freeing, thawing, unravelling, or sudden ending
débris—ruins, wreckage, rubbish
demesne—domain
dénouement—issue, conclusion
devoir—duty

GLOSSARY

- diable*—devil
dieu—god
dis donc!—say!
douaniers—customs men
écoute—listen
élan—jerk, impetus
éleveur de moutons—sheep breeder
elle veut savoir quelque chose à propos de son mari—
 she wants to know something concerning her husband
elle veut savoir s'il lui est encore fidèle—she wants to
 know if he is still faithful to her
en avant—forward
enceinte—pregnant
enfin—at last
en flagrant délit—in the act, *in flagrante delictu*
ennuyé—bored, annoyed, disturbed
esprit—wit
esprits forts—great minds
fanfaronnade—brag, parade
ferme ta gueule—shut your mouth
fèves au lard—pork and beans
fiancé—betrothed
fil—son; *Begin fils*—Begin junior
friperies—trappings
gaillard—gallant, bold-spirited
génie—engineering
grisette—flirt of the working class
habitant—the peasant of French Canada
hein!—eh!
ici-te (for *ici*)—here
ingénieur civil—civil engineer
je gage que non quand je la regarde—I wager that he
 isn't, on looking her over
jeunesse—young man, youth
la bête puante—the stinking beast, the skunk
lac—lake

GLOSSARY

- le bon Dieu*—the good God
le docteur—the doctor
le Grand Empereur—the Great Emperor (Napoleon)
le limier—the blood-hound, the spy
le vieux—the old one, the old man
le vieux est de retour—the old man is back
les affaires—business
longue vue—field glass, binoculars
M. (for *Monsieur*)—Mr.
M. le Premier Ministre—the Prime Minister
magasin—store, shop
maintenant—now
maison—house
mam'selle (for *mademoiselle*)—miss
marche donc!—get on!
mari—husband
masques—masks
maudit—accursed, damned, damn!
ménage—household
merci—thank you, thanks
migraine—headache, neuralgia
milieu—center, middle, surroundings
Mlle. (for *Mademoiselle*)—Miss
MM. (for *Messieurs*)—Messrs.
Mme. (for *Madame*)—Mrs.
mon ami—my friend
mon cher—my dear
mon vieux—old man
n'est ce pas?—is it not?
noblesse—nobility
non—no
oui—yes
par exemple—for instance
pardon—pardon me, excuse me
parti—party, match
pas du tout—not at all

GLOSSARY

- père*—father ; *Begin père*—Begin senior
père et fils—father and son
pour la charité—for the sake of charity
potack (for *patates*)—potatoes
regarde—look
regardez—look
religieuses—nuns
Rose Quesnel—a brand of native tobacco
sacré—sacred, damn !
salut—salute, greeting
sans doute—doubtless, without a doubt
savoir faire—knowledge of how to behave
seigneurs—seigniors, lords of the manor
son père (for *mon père*)—my father
sou—penny
tabac naturel—unblended tobacco, native tobacco
tendresses—caresses
terrains—grounds, land
terre—land, farm
tiens!—here!, look !
torricu (for *corps-de-dieu*)—old French oath
tout de suite—right away
trays beans (pidgin English for *très bien*)—very well
très épris—much taken, struck
très faible—very feeble
va t'en—go away
viens 'cite (for *viens ici*)—come here
vra' (for *vrai*)—really, truly
vraiment—really
whiskey blanc—white whiskey, moonshine

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